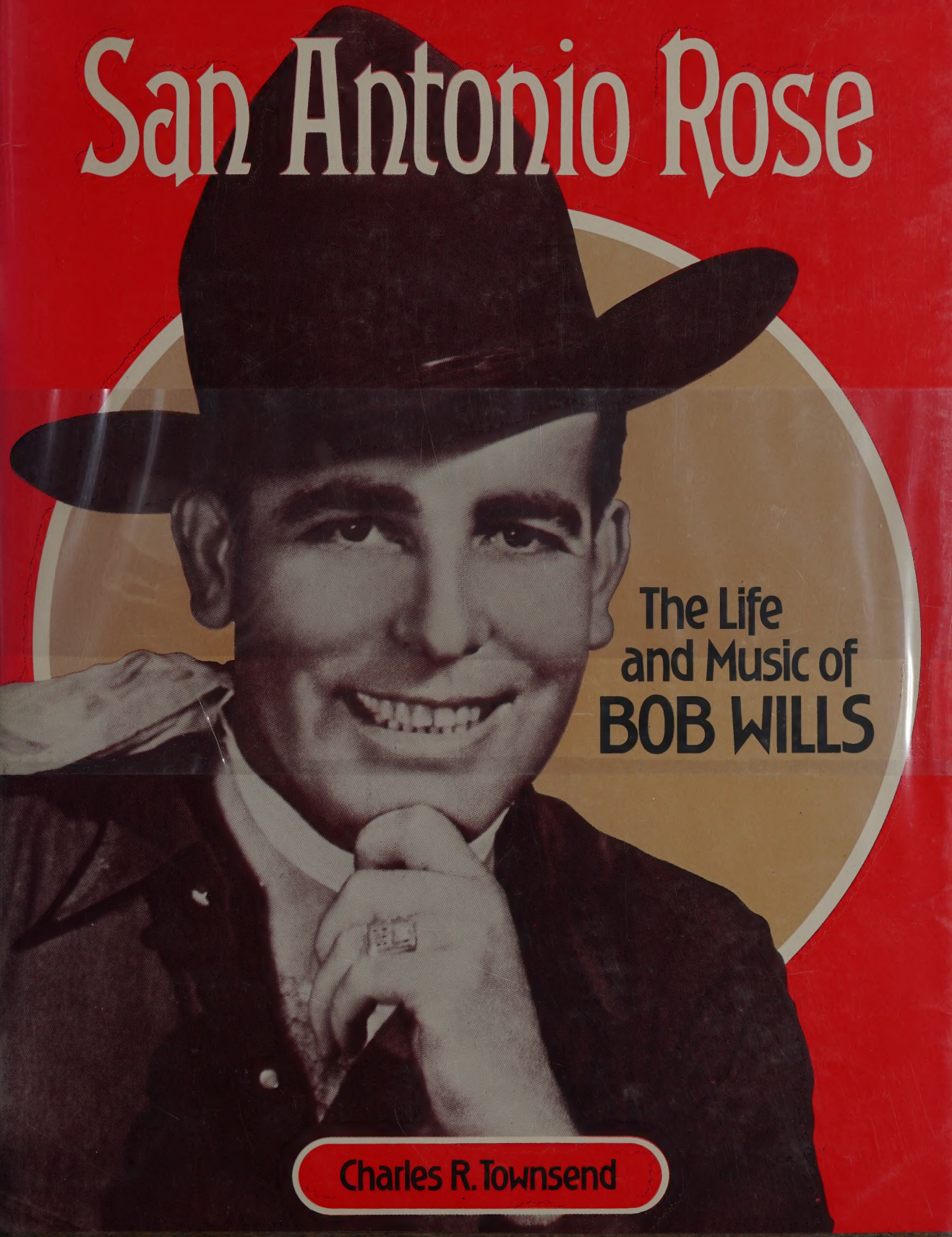
San Antonio Rose



The Life and Music of BOB WILLS

Charles R. Townsend

$12.50

SAN ANTONIO ROSE
The Life and Music of Bob Wills

Charles R. Townsend

Merle Haggard called him "the best damn fiddle player in the world." A *New York Times* obituary said he was "a super-giant before there were super-giants, an Elvis Presley of the nineteen-thirties and forties." In Texas, at least, according to Waylon Jennings, Bob Wills is *still* the king.

"Until Hank Williams came along, it was just Bob Wills," says Willie Nelson. "He was *it*." And indeed he was, especially for the thousands in the Southwest who knew and loved Bob Wills. The colorful band-leader-composer-fiddler from Turkey, Texas, was the one performer who for years lassoed the emotions of country-and-western fans nationwide. For a while in the early forties, his records sold better than those of any other recording artist. He was voted not only into the Country Music Hall of Fame in Nashville, but also into the National Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City, the only performer other than Gene Autry to be so honored.

Wills brought country music closer to the city when he created western swing, a dynamic hybrid of New Orleans jazz, blues, and folk fiddle music that kept a Depression populace on its feet. For more than fifty years, Wills and his several bands — most notably, the Texas Playboys — entertained the nation with such classics as his "San Antonio Rose," "Faded Love," "Steel Guitar Rag," and "Take Me Back to Tulsa."

What caught on first in Texas and Oklahoma later spread across the country, and in the process Bob Wills became a legend. More than a dozen cowboy movies which he and his Texas Playboys made in the forties helped swell the legend to mammoth proportions.

On May 13, 1975, Bob Wills died. But the reverence for the man and the respect for his music live on. His influence can be noted in much of what is heard today under the "country" heading. As a successful melder of several musical styles, he left an indelible imprint on the music world. The country rock band Asleep at the Wheel is only one contemporary group in which the legacy is apparent.

Wills lives on, too, in this compelling and warm narrative. Affectionately written by a Texan who responded to the legendary fiddler's magnetism, SAN ANTONIO ROSE is a meticulous recapturing of Wills and the musical excitement he created.

Continued on back flap

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The Life and Music of BOB WILLS

Charles R. Townsend

with a Discography and Filmusicography by
Bob Pinson

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To the memory of two great teachers

My father
CLAUDE WEBSTER TOWNSEND
Who taught me to love music
and
My brother
DR. BILL B. TOWNSEND
Who taught me to love scholarship

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Preface

> In all my long experience of recording, no one with Columbia or anyone else deserves a study, in depth, as Bob does.
>
> Arthur E. Satherley, February 26, 1973

> You can change the name of an old song, rearrange it and make it swing.
>
> Bob Wills, "Time Changes Everything"

I first heard Bob Wills on the radio when I was four or five years old. I grew up during the age of radio, listened to all forms of music, and loved classical, folk, blues, New Orleans jazz, the crooners, and, like most people, the big swing bands. Bob Wills's music was a composite of nearly all these forms, and yet, it seemed to me, he maintained a style all his own. As a teenager, I often defended his music to those who labeled it with the pejorative term *hillbilly*. I could not then and I cannot now accept the simplistic generalization that term connotes. I felt his music and style were much more complex and that in the future both the man and his music would be important in the history of popular music in America. Of course, I did not dare make such a study in college. Like too many college students, I was told, either implicitly or explicitly, that "scholars" did not study popular culture and that anything popular was "bad." It could be enlightening to study popular culture or music if it was two or three hundred or a thousand years old. It was scholarly to study the life of Al Capone or the cliff dwellers at Mesa Verde but not of Louis Armstrong, Milton Berle, John Lennon, or Bing Crosby.

As a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin, I was fortunate enough to come under the influence of teachers with more catholic interests, some of whom had even studied popular culture. In that stimulating and liberating environment, I became fascinated with the prospect of historians writing monographs concerning popular figures of the world of entertainment. It was while I was in Madison that I first thought of writing this biography of Bob Wills.

Even at that time I sensed that source material for such a study would be very difficult to find. I would probably have gone no further with the study had it not been for two incidents, one in New York and one in Texas. In the mid-1960s, when I was in New York for the annual meeting of the American Historical Association, I heard a delightful speech by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., concerning sources for contemporary history. He mentioned oral history and the preservation of history by means of tape-recorded interviews. Inadvertently, Professor Schlesinger had helped me solve the problem of source material for this study. A few months after the New York meeting, Professor Sylvan Dunn, Director of the Southwest Collection at Texas Tech University, approached me with a tape recorder and financial aid to do summer research for the newly formed Oral History Project. Eventually my research trips took me through the little town of Turkey, Texas, where Bob Wills spent his childhood and young manhood. I found that many people there were eager to help me with the research for a biography of Wills. Within the next few years, I interviewed many people in the Turkey area and eventually began making trips all over the United States to interview not only musicians who had worked for Wills, but also fans and friends who had heard him or who knew him. I saw by the late 1960s that the study would be basically oral history. I also realized that I would have to use other nontraditional historical sources such as popular recordings (Wills made more than 550), radio transcriptions, recordings of informal jam sessions on the bus or in hotel rooms, recordings of dances and commercials, trade magazines, scrapbooks, and discographies.

Almost at the same time I began to get seriously involved in the research, Bob Wills had a stroke, and there was a great deal of doubt as to whether he would ever recover. In fact, he had the stroke a day or two after I had called a mutual friend to arrange an interview. I felt then I would never get to interview Wills himself, but I was more determined than ever to do the research. A historical society in Oklahoma learned of my study and asked me to write an article on Wills for their journal. They also informed me that Bob Wills's brothers, Johnnie Lee, Luther J., and Billy Jack, were performing in Oklahoma City. I went there to interview them as well as his youngest sister and two of his nieces. They hoped I could see Wills sometime in the future, but, they said, he could see no one at that time.

A few months later, Johnnie Lee Wills arranged for me to go to Fort Worth to interview Bob and his wife, Betty. Though they had been reluctant to authorize a biography of Wills, they received me warmly and decided to assist me in the research. They said they were glad the biography would be done by a trained scholar, and their main concern was that it be factual and that it put Wills's music in its proper perspective in the

history of American music. At once they grasped the idea that oral history would be the basis of the study. They were cordial and helpful in granting me countless interviews. Moreover, they called all over the United States to arrange for other interviews and source material. At no time during the research and writing of this book did they try to edit or censor it. Naturally, Bob and Betty tried to influence my interpretations, but they generally did this more out of a concern for accuracy than anything else. If I found information they felt was incorrect, they simply suggested I interview other sources before I reached a final conclusion. Bob Wills left me as free to write the story of his music as he and his musicians were in performing it.

Everyone I interviewed was aware that the material would be used in a book. I have cited their names in the notes and in the Essay on Sources. Since Wills was not a political figure, and since he was never a controversial figure, only a very few persons asked that their names not be published. I have honored their wishes and have cited these few as "confidential communication." On some occasions the best interviews came after I had turned the recorder off and was walking to the door; at other times someone I was talking to might volunteer statements about Wills that were relevant to the study. I refer to these nonrecorded interviews as "field notes." I plan to put copies of the tapes I have used in this study, along with other source material and photographs, in three or four research centers across the United States. All of them will be under a time seal and eventually will be made available to other scholars.

For the most part, I have been concerned with Bob Wills as a popular artist or entertainer. I have been concerned with his music as popular music that was basically intended for dancing and entertainment; that is how he and all his musicians regarded it. I have been economical in trying to point out deep social messages, hidden or overt, in his music. If one were studying Joan Baez or Pete Seeger, social comment and protest would be of vital significance. But surely—especially as we have more and more leisure time in the last quarter of the twentieth century—there is value in studying music merely as entertainment and as a form of popular art and culture.

During the years of research and writing, I have received assistance from many people. I have tried to show my appreciation at appropriate places in the notes. My greatest debt is, of course, to Bob and Betty Wills for the many hours they granted me for interviews. I also wish to express my gratitude to their children and grandchildren for their patience and understanding in allowing me to interrupt their Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving holidays by taking tape recorders into their homes and monopolizing the time of their parents and grandparents. I am also in debt for the kindness of Bob Wills's brothers and sisters, Luther J. Wills, Billy Jack Wills, Ruby Wills Sullivan, Eloise Wills House, and Lorene Wills

Burton. Above all, Bob's younger brother, Johnnie Lee Wills, was of invaluable help. Every former member of Wills's band, the Texas Playboys, that I called on was eager to help.

Beyond the Wills family my greatest debt is to Glenn P. White. For this study, he made available every phonograph recording Wills ever made, radio transcriptions, tapes of Wills's dances and other public performances, correspondence, newspapers, photographs, and scrapbooks—all of which he has collected since he was in elementary school. Without Glenn P. White, this biography would not have been possible. Everyone interested in Wills is indebted to Bob Healy, Glenn P. White, and Bob Pinson for the excellent discography they published in *Record Research.* I am especially indebted to Bob Pinson, now at the Country Music Foundation Library and Media Center, for his help in revising and updating that original work. Richard B. Allen, Curator of the Archive of New Orleans Jazz, Tulane University, took hours out of a busy schedule to aid me in phases of this research. Ken Griffis, a director of the John Edwards Memorial Foundation at UCLA, made tapes and materials available and was helpful when I sought his counsel. Guy Logsdon, Director of Libraries, University of Tulsa, was liberal with his time and research material.

I have benefited from the generosity and training of several teachers, colleagues, and friends at West Texas State University. Professors Matilda Gaume and Norman J. Nelson kindly shared their knowledge of American music. Professor George Eason subjected chapter 5, "Western Jazz," to thorough review. John Green, Dean of the College of Fine Arts, gave similar attention to chapter 14, " 'San Antonio Rose,' Western Swing, and Some of the Finest Jazzmen You've Ever Heard." I am indebted to Professor Michael Green, a former colleague in the Department of History, Dr. Lloyd Watkins, and Dean Theodore T. Freidell for their encouragement and intellectual companionship; to Professor Duane Guy, whose administrative expertise afforded me the necessary time to do research and writing; and to the Organized Research Committee for awarding me a research grant to subsidize the completion of this study. It is impossible to express my appreciation for Mary Whitten, who patiently and tenaciously typed and retyped the manuscript. I especially want to thank my students at West Texas State University, who, during several years of lectures on the history of American music, helped me develop and clarify some of the ideas in this book.

Every author fortunate enough to be included in the Music in American Life series is indebted to Richard L. Wentworth and the University of Illinois Press for their pioneer efforts in publishing studies on folk-rooted American music. Judith McCulloh of that distinguished press has given more help and encouragement in the preparation of this volume than she knows.

Intellectually, my heaviest debt is to Merle Curti of the University of Wisconsin, in whose seminars I learned to appreciate the culture of *all* the American people. I thank my mother and father, who instilled in me a love of music, especially blues, jazz, and folk music. Finally, my wife, Mary, was not only a wise counselor but a severe critic as well. She and the children were good companions on the research trips—some of which proved very exciting.

They got a fiddler there that always slickens his hair,
An' folks he sure do pull some bow.
W. C. Handy, "Memphis Blues"

Deep within my heart lies a melody,
A song of old San Antone.
Bob Wills, "San Antonio Rose"

1

Cotton Fields and Cotton Camps

> Papa didn't show up, so I played the fiddle at my first dance.
>
> I don't know whether they [the Negroes] made them up as they moved down the cotton rows or not. But they sang blues you never heard before.
>
> Bob Wills

Between Little Red River and Big Red River, about a mile off the highway that connects the small Texas towns of Turkey and Lakeview, stands an old abandoned farmhouse. Like so many other farm homes today, this one appears to be of another age. Weeds grow around it; in front, grass covers the old highway that was once the proud thoroughfare to Memphis. If one stands in the deep sand where cotton once grew and knows the history of that farm, it is easy to imagine that life is blooming there again. First, a lonesome fiddle strikes up a frontier tune, crowding out the sound of the West Texas wind. A second fiddle provides the harmony, and then the rhythm of a guitar joins the fiddles. Finally, a piano adds a melodic beat, and once again the old farm is alive with the sound of music. It was the music of the John Wills family that filled the air and soared across those cotton fields in the 1920s. Nearly every member of that family had musical talent. Years later the young man who played the second fiddle took that basic frontier folk music, embellished it with jazz and popular musical idioms, and gave Texas, the Southwest, and finally the world a new music. The young musician was Bob Wills, and the music that came out of that farmhouse was eventually called western swing. It is the purpose of this study to trace the life of Bob Wills and to put his music in its proper perspective in the overall history of American music.

Bob Wills was born March 6, 1905, on a farm near Kosse in Limestone County, Texas, the first of ten children born to John Tompkins Wills and Emmaline Foley Wills. Bob was of the third generation of Willses born in Texas. The family had migrated from England to America in the colonial period, and George Wills was one of the first settlers in Tennessee. Bob's great-grandfather, Dr. Saladin H. Wills, moved to East Texas in 1845,

along with three of his brothers. They were mainly of English extraction, with some Irish blood in their veins. All four brothers were college men. They had planned a career in the Presbyterian ministry, but, for reasons unknown, entered the medical profession sometime before they moved to Texas. One of them later set up practice at Wills Point, another at Gatesville, a third at Teague, and Dr. Saladin H. Wills at Groesbeck in Limestone County. Saladin Wills married Nancy Hunter and, until his death in 1881, was a successful physician and land speculator. Bob's grandfather, Tom W. Wills, married Mary Lou Tompkins. She was born in Louisiana of French and Cherokee stock.

The Foleys, Bob's mother's family, had also lived in Texas for at least three generations. Like the Wills family, they were mainly English with some Irish ancestry. Amos Foley, Bob's grandfather, married pretty Mississippi-born Amanda Ainsworth, who was also of English descent.[1] Their daughter Emmaline married John Wills on February 18, 1904.

Bob was given the same name as his great-uncle, James Robert Wills. The family expected the child to follow in the footsteps of his namesake and become a fiddler. When Jim Rob (as he was first called) was only a few hours old, a clairvoyant relative remarked that his fingers were those of a fiddler. Though such concern appears strange in the space age, to the Wills and Foley families it was only natural to look for marks that might indicate musical inclination. Tom Wills, John Wills, James Robert Wills, Amos Foley, and all Amos's sons—Tom, James, Felix, and George—were good fiddlers. It was generally assumed that the two families included some of the best fiddlers in Limestone County, if not in all the Brazos River country.[2]

Fiddlers were the favorite musicians on the American frontier, which Limestone County still resembled.[3] The fiddle was the ideal instrument for the ever-expanding, mobile frontiers and was, in fact, referred to in the nineteenth century as the "royal instrument of the frontier."[4] People moving to the West had space in their wagons or on their horses for only the necessities of life. They denied themselves such heavy items as pianos, organs, and bulky brass instruments. But the stringed instruments—banjos, guitars, and fiddles—were neither heavy, bulky, nor expensive. They could be used both in religious services and for entertainment. Music helped people in primitive conditions express their way of life, even though their folk melodies and lyrics were simple.[5] Shortly after the Battle of New Orleans, for instance, and just before Stephen F. Austin took his colony to Texas, someone composed a tune especially for the fiddle entitled "The Eighth of January."[6] It served not only as rhythm for the square dance but also as a reminder that Old Hickory had defeated the "bloody British" in the town of New Orleans on that date.

This frontier fiddle music[7] was one of the first sounds and, certainly, the first music young Wills ever heard. His grandfathers and his father all played it when he was still in the cradle. Parents and grandparents expected young Robert to play the fiddle no later than the year he entered school and to carry on the proud tradition. In his early childhood, relatives remembered, he loved to listen to music and would dance whenever he heard anything rhythmic. One of the first recollections Jim Rob's aunt Ida Foley Walker had of him, for instance, was seeing him dance around the kitchen, at age three or four, while her sister Emma ground coffee. To the family's disappointment, however, Jim Rob showed no interest in any musical instrument. Perhaps a new land would call out that latent talent.

In the fall of 1913, the Wills family loaded their possessions into two covered wagons and moved five hundred miles northwest to Hall County, near Memphis, Texas. John Wills's half brother, Saladin Wills, was already living near Memphis and had written letters about the opportunities for farmers in West Texas.[8] When John and Emmaline Wills left Limestone County they had four children, James Robert ("Jim Rob"), Ruby, Eloise, and Johnnie Lee. John Wills's father, Tom Wills ("Uncle Tom," as his grandchildren called him), Tom's wife, and their adopted daughter migrated to the West with Jim Rob's family. The future bandleader and composer, then aged eight, followed close behind the wagon on his donkey, Little Joe. Ever since Jim Rob was five, the donkey had been his prize possession. He had "trained it to jump ditches, hurdles, and to bow."[9] Though he did not know it then, Jim Rob's love of horses and livestock prepared him well for his new home, for he was en route to one of the largest and most famous ranching areas in the world, where horses, cattle, and cowboys were a way of life. That area and lifestyle would affect his own life and deeply mark his musical career. It took the Wills wagon train more than two months to make the trip because they stopped at farms all along the way and picked cotton. On a few occasions they slept in and under the wagon, but most of the time they lived in little shacks provided by the farmers for whom they picked cotton. They supplemented their meager income by playing for dances. Either Tom or John Wills played fiddle, and James Robert accompanied them on the mandolin. "We had music all the way," the children remembered.[10]

Theirs was not the only folk music in those cotton camps. The many Negro families there added a different musical dimension.[11] Their music deeply impressed young Jim Rob. It is likely they played the only other type of music he had heard up to that time. He had heard it since he was old enough to remember anything, from black neighbors near the farm where he was born. Above all, the horns the Negroes played fascinated him. "They generally always had trumpets and guitars, and I will never forget

how well they played them." Years after this experience, he combined the frontier fiddles his family played with the instruments the Negroes played in those cotton shanties. "I combined them," he said, "because I've loved horns since I was a little boy."[12]

It was significant that Wills learned much of his music and style *directly* from blacks. Many other white musicians learned from them, but generally from afar, via radio or recordings, never really touching their lives, rubbing elbows, sharing their sorrows, joys, and poverty, working alongside them, and living in their culture as young Jim Rob did. He said he never played with many white children, other than his two sisters and younger brother, until he was seven or eight years old. Negroes were his earliest playmates, and his father enjoyed watching him jig dance with black children. It was a study in coordination and rhythm, especially as both white and black musicians provided the appropriate music. Jim Rob did much more than *learn* rhythm with the blacks; he got a *feeling* for it, a feeling that enabled him to lay down a beat, create a tempo, and develop patterns for dancing that astounded musicians in his band who were much better trained than himself.[13]

In the cotton camps, the children often competed in jig-dancing contests, and both blacks and whites enjoyed listening to the music and watching the dancers. They soon forgot their poverty and the hard day's work as the whole camp was swinging.[14] Later in the evening, when things had quieted down and the children were in bed, the sound of a trumpet could be heard coming from one of the Negro shacks, wailing out the blues. Often the Negro women would join the wail of the trumpet or the strains of a guitar and cry out a blues song. These blacks had an endless blues repertory. While working, one of them would begin to hum or sing, and before long the whole field would be alive with the sound of the blues. They could sing off and on all day and never sing the same song twice. "I don't know whether they made them up as they moved down the cotton rows or not," Wills said, with a twinkle in his eye and an approving smile on his face, "but they sang blues you never heard before."[15]

Now that blues has become a major influence on popular music and has become more sophisticated than the rural blues Wills admired, it is easy to overlook the importance of the blues as a nineteenth- and twentieth-century folk music.[16] In the cotton camps and cotton fields in the early years of this century, there were two important strains of American folk music, both rural in origin and development—frontier fiddle music, such as that played by the Wills family, and Negro blues. Young Jim Rob Wills stayed close to his own family's music for the next twenty years; but in less than twenty-five years he bridged the gap between the two folk musics and combined white frontier fiddle music with Negro blues and jazz to develop a music and style of his own. Wills's music was the confluence of these two

streams. Before Wills brought them together in the 1930s, both streams underwent some change, as the tributaries of popular and other musics flowed into them. Nevertheless, the mainstreams were still basically folk.

Because James Robert became a famous fiddle player, the influence of frontier fiddle music on his career is well known. What is not known, or at least not fully explored and appreciated, is the extent to which Negro folk music later characterized Wills's music. He often told close friends and members of his band, for instance, that he learned a great deal about rhythm from the black cotton pickers. These rhythms became a permanent part of his own music. Still another characteristic Wills and the blacks had in common was the uninhibited way both expressed their souls in music. Later, when their music was heard on radio and recordings, those better trained in music would frown on the "folkish" and "jazzy" way they took liberties with musical rules and played and sang more from feeling than from training.

Wills and the Negroes were themselves in their music, and they expressed a way of life that many Americans wanted to forget existed. In some ways, they were protesting both against society and against formalism in music. Even when they were not aware of this, their music provided an emotional release. In many areas of American life at that time there was a revolt against formalism: Thorstein Veblen in economics; Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., in law; Frederick Jackson Turner and Charles A. Beard in history; John Dewey in philosophy and education.[17] There were other revolutionaries in thought and action in the tumultuous Populist-Progressive era. By the 1930s the folk musics of those cotton camps would help change, if not revolutionize, many areas of American music. Smokey Dacus, Wills's first drummer and long-time member of his band, summarized his contribution to American music: "Bob Wills took music out of the straitjacket."[18] If this is too much to say of any one person, it is not suggesting too much to say that Wills's generation, the Jazz Age, did more than any other to remove America's musical straitjacket.

Even after his family ceased to live in the cotton camps, Jim Rob was always around Negroes. At the time they traveled from East to West Texas, the family was, in some respects, on about the same socio-economic level as these blacks: both were trying to survive by picking cotton at "so much per hundred."[19] After the Wills family rented or bought their own farms, they still hired blacks to do a good deal of the work.[20] Since John and Emmaline Wills were too poor to provide young Robert with formal musical training, this association in the cotton camps and cotton fields was one of the best schools, perhaps the only one, in which he studied music.

One must guard against making these cotton camps appear romantic and idyllic. There was little romance in the fact that entire families (all who were able and old enough to pull a cotton sack and many who were not)

worked twelve to fourteen hours a day in a cotton patch. The shacks were generally cold, vermin-infested, and grossly overcrowded.[21] Doubtless, some of the men who played the fiddles, trumpets, and guitars had hands so chapped from wind and weather and cut by sharp edges of cotton hulls they could hardly play. The women who sang the blues probably did it from a blue soul. Their bodies were weary with picking cotton from sunup until sundown. Then they had to cook a meager meal, feed their families, and clean up the shacks. They washed their families' clothes by drawing water from a well, heating it in a washpot outdoors over a wood fire, and scrubbing them on a rubboard. This did more to irritate sores caused by cotton hulls than it did to clean the clothing.[22] Human nature being what it is, there were race problems between whites and blacks (and the Mexicans who were sometimes there), as there are today.[23] Often all the two races had in common was their bigotry, poverty, ignorance, and love of music. At best it was a life of mere survival, and there was very little in those cotton camps that the people who lived in them would have thought romantic. Everyone, black and white, got out as soon as he had the opportunity. Long before these people began to make their voices heard and better their lot through the ballot box in the 1930s, their music had already liberated many of them. Jim Rob Wills, like many others in the South and Southwest, was liberated from the poverty and deprivation of the cotton culture by the folk music he had learned so much about in that culture.

The Wills family literally picked their way from Limestone County to Fort Worth. Upon their arrival there, they decided to leave the cotton fields long enough to rest, relax, and visit relatives a few days. At first they camped in the Fort Worth wagon yard.[24] For children born in Kosse, Fort Worth was a fascinating place anyway, and Ruby, Eloise, and Jim Rob never forgot the thrill of staying in that huge yard, where hundreds of families pulled in their wagons or buggies and slept and cooked right on the grounds. A nearby livery stable housed and fed their horses and mules. If the weather was good, travelers fed their own stock out of the wagon to cut expenses. Fortunately, the Willses got a break from sleeping in the cotton shacks and in the wagon when they finally located their relatives.

The next few days gave everyone a needed rest, though they really could not appreciate it, for they still had more than 250 miles to travel. They said good-bye to their relatives and Fort Worth in late September and again followed the white fields of cotton toward the west. When one field was picked over, they moved to another. They stayed in cotton shacks if they were fortunate enough to get one; otherwise they slept in and around the wagon. It took them a month to pick their way from Fort Worth to Childress, strategically located on the Fort Worth and Denver Railroad and the largest town in the area. They stayed there a day or two at the wagon yard, resting themselves and their livestock and replenishing their

supplies. John Wills took the children to a theater in Childress, the first they had ever been in.[25]

When they left Childress, the Wills family was only thirty miles from the end of their five-hundred-mile journey to West Texas. Just beyond Childress they came into the environment of the High Plains of Texas. Cotton picking got better as they moved from farm to farm and neared Memphis. They had high hopes they would make their fortune by raising their own cotton in that "Memphis of the West." They had the ambition, but only what little money they had saved by working in cotton fields halfway across Texas, hardly enough to insure success. When they left West Texas nearly twenty years later, they probably had less—if that were possible—than when they arrived in the fall of 1913. Their fortune and destiny lay not in raising cotton, but rather in their musical talents and the fiddles they brought in their wagon.

Memphis itself lay in a good cotton-growing area, but the region generally was better suited for cattle ranching. The Wills family settled in a fringe area that lay between the farming lands and the ranching lands. The ranching environment was to make the deepest impact on the family, especially on James Rob. Both socially and economically they would grow closer to the ranch people of West Texas.[26]

The Wills family arrived in Memphis when the cotton harvest was in full swing. They picked cotton for Saladin Wills and other local farmers. Eloise remembered working so late in the fields that winter, they picked cotton in the snow. In that fall of 1913 and winter of 1914, they lived in a dugout or cellar. While sod houses were ubiquitous on the Great Plains because of the lack of timber to erect frame dwellings, there was plenty of timber in Memphis. But the Wills family did not have the money for rent, or else they did not wish to spend what little they had. The dugout was on a farm owned by relatives, Edell and Odell McKenzie,[27] who had either bought or rented the place from the Ogden Ranch. For people who had been living in one-room cotton shanties and traveling for weeks in a wagon, this dugout was adequate, if not desirable. Emma Wills and the older daughters had to "make down beds" every night, some on the dirt floor.[28] They had just one stove for heating and cooking. Scorpions, roaches, and vermin of various kinds presented problems. Centipedes often dropped into the food they were cooking or eating, or on the beds, or, even worse, down one's collar.

The deprivations of the winter of 1913–14 were soon forgotten when John Wills rented a farm on the Ogden Ranch in the spring of 1914. It was located about nine miles from Memphis. The Willses proudly called it the "farm on the hill." It had been more than six months since the family had lived in a house they could really call home. They had plenty of room and even had a telephone on a party line known as "Whittaker, Whitten, and

Wills." The Wills children liked the place and loved to play on the wood-covered "mountain" that lay behind the farmhouse. Jim Rob, Ruby, and Eloise went to Newlin School in a buggy.[29]

Jim Rob fell in love with the cowboy life and ranching environment of West Texas. He and his playmates tried to "ride anything they could lay a rope on." When the family first arrived in West Texas, Jim Rob tried riding bucking calves. He soon graduated to bucking cows, bulls, and, finally, broncs. The hardest-bucking animals in the area, according to Jim Rob, were the wild mules: "Some of 'em was dad-burn hard to ride." Riding and roping was a way of life in West Texas: young boys picked up a rope or forked a bronc with as little compulsion as youngsters play baseball and football today. Jim Rob and his friends loved to participate in the rodeos at Memphis or Estelline. There Jim Rob tried bronc riding and steer roping. He never claimed to be a top hand, but he loved to ride the wild ones. In a more practical way, he enjoyed assisting neighboring ranchers at roundup time. He helped them round up and pen their herds; then he worked in the pens branding, dehorning, and dipping all the cattle, and castrating the bull calves.

During his youth, Jim Rob always wanted to appear more of a cowboy than he really was. Once when a group of fellows from Memphis went to visit him, he took them on a ride. Jim Rob took the lead on a trail off Little Red River. "We looked like Indians going up the trail, one after the other. I was trying to be a cowboy in front of the town boys. I was a kid and wanted to make it look scary. We started up a little slant. I told 'em about the rattlesnakes." Jim Rob turned in his saddle, looked back at the riders, and warned, "Keep your eyes open for rattlesnakes." As he turned forward, he glanced down and saw a huge rattlesnake directly in front of his horse. Jim Rob grabbed his lariat rope and swung it like a whip toward the snake. By chance, and only by chance, he hit the reptile "square on the head" and killed it. His visitors from town, however, concluded he was "quite a cowboy."[30]

John Wills probably put in only one or two crops on this farm. About 1915, he moved his family from the farm on the hill to another farm on the Ogden Ranch. A Mr. Lindley had bought some acreage from the ranch and was leasing it to farmers like Wills who had come west. Even the famous JA Ranch was selling some of its lands for farms. Contrary to stories in newspapers and magazines,[31] John Wills was never a sharecropper; he always rented the land and took his chances. He believed that if he could make money for another man he could do the same for himself. Moreover, if he rented, he could be the boss.[32]

It was about the time they moved to the Ogden Ranch that Jim Rob played his first fiddle tune. The Wills and Foley families had hoped he would play the violin even before they left Limestone County. Although

James Robert Wills at five months. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

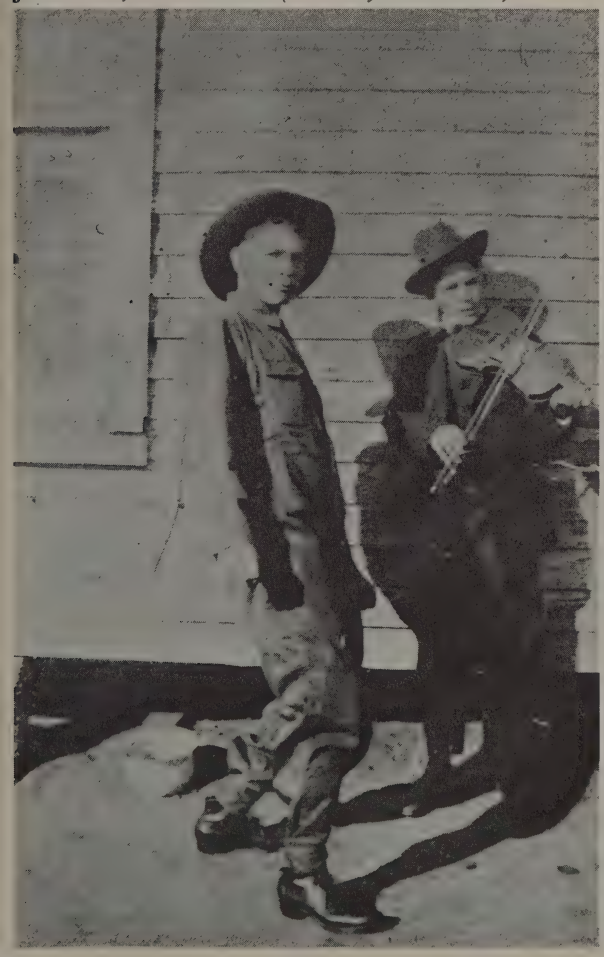
John and Emma Wills and their three-year-old son, James Robert. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

Jim Rob and his father in Memphis, Texas, in 1915, the year Jim Rob played his first dance as a fiddler. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

Members of the Saladin Wills and John Wills families on the Ogden Ranch, about 1915. *Left to right:* Irene Wills, Saladin Wills, Eloise Wills holding unidentified child, Lou Wills holding unidentified child, unidentified child, Johnnie Lee Wills. *(Courtesy Maggie Wills Baker)*

Jim Rob Wills at age twelve, on the Ogden Ranch in West Texas, with John Wills holding his horse. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

This is the earliest photograph ever found of Jim Rob Wills with his fiddle; he is fourteen or fifteen. His father, John Wills, is to the left. *(Courtesy Edna Wills)*



Jim Rob Wills about 1920, in West Texas on the Ogden Ranch. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

The John Wills and Saladin Wills families, near Memphis, Texas, early 1920s. *Left to right:* Gertrude Wills, Mamie Adams, Maggie Wills, Ruby Wills, Irene Wills, Saladin Wills, Opal Wills, Mary Lou (Mrs. Tom) Wills, Eloise Wills, Luke Wills held by John Wills, Johnnie Lee Wills, Thomas Wilson, Jim Rob Wills, Alga Wills, Emma Wills holding baby. *(Courtesy Gertrude Wills Fowler)*

Ruby and Gertrude Wills on the Ogden Ranch near Memphis, Texas, 1918. Note the mandolin Ruby is holding. *(Courtesy Maggie Wills Baker)*

John and Emma Wills in the late 1920s. *(Courtesy Edna Wills)*

Jim Rob Wills at age seventeen in Knox County, Texas, at the time he was preaching. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

Jim Rob Wills about 1925, in West Texas. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

At T. M. Gay's on the Ogden Ranch near Memphis, Texas, 1921. Note the buggy in the background. *Left to right:* Bob Gay, Jim Rob Wills. *(Courtesy Sophie Gay Stilwell)*

Jim Rob Wills, age twenty-two. *(Courtesy Robbie Wills Calhoun)*

his father and grandfather had shown him the elementary principles of the fiddle and had encouraged him to play it, he showed little or no interest in the instrument. He was content to second on the mandolin or guitar while they fiddled, and his interest seemed to end at that point.[32] It would be romantic to say that the new land, the West, prompted him to play the fiddle. Much less romantic is the fact that a cousin's sawing on the violin was so painful to his ears that in desperation young Wills wagered he could play the tune better than the cousin, with the firm understanding that the cousin cease the concert if he succeeded. Cousin Olford Sanders conceded, smashed his fiddle, and promised never to play again. James Robert was happy, and at last the Wills and Foley families were happy, for the grandchild could carry on their proud musical tradition.[33]

Jim Rob got the rest of his education while the family lived at the farm on the hill. He had first gone to school at Newlin; later, he, Ruby, and Eloise drove a buggy to Friendship School, a few miles from the farm.[34] He completed the seventh grade, about average for a boy of that period. Times were too hard for cotton farmers for him to have gone much farther. As the oldest child in a family that eventually numbered ten children, he was expected to help support them, which he did while still in his teens; later he provided for them almost entirely, and he helped support his mother until she died in 1972.

Because Jim Rob was the oldest child, and because of his sacrifices on their behalf, John and Emma Wills always held him in special regard and insisted the rest of the family treat him accordingly. Their attitude developed years before he became famous. Ruby remembered: "Pappy and Mammy spoiled him to pieces. . . . We [children] looked up to him. We were taught that way. We just came up that way, and him just a kid like us when he was a little boy." Though he worked hard in providing for the family, Bob and Ruby both believed this deference, and the insistence that the other children let him have his way, contributed to the personal problems that plagued him later in his career. A decade and a half later, when Bob was having so much difficulty in his marriages, he concluded: "I know how I've suffered. . . . I'm not going to raise a spoiled child. Because I know what a hell I've been through just from that."[35]

Jim Rob helped his family not only by working in the cotton fields, but also by playing music. Soon after the Wills family arrived in West Texas, they were in demand as musicians for dances. Eloise remarked that it was not unusual for them to travel forty miles to play for a dance.[36] At first they traveled in a buggy or on horseback, if only John and Jim Rob went. Later they took the community school bus, loaded with their family, their instruments, and dancers from the community. Just what sort of arrangements were made with the local school board is not clear. By the early 1920s Jim Rob bought a Model T Ford to make such trips.[37]

Though most of these West Texas dances were held at ranches, they were generally referred to as "country dances." Bob Wills, however, often referred to them as "ranch dances."[38] The influence of the country or ranch dances on Wills's music was very important. The country or ranch dance was also significant as an institution in the social life of many Americans. Though it varied from place to place, certain of its characteristics endured from the colonial era through the frontiers and eventually to established communities across the nation. Except for a few isolated places, the end of this phenomenon has come. It deserves more specialized study from the social historian than it can receive here.[39]

When someone decided to give a dance at his ranch or farm, word was passed from neighbor to neighbor, by people on the streets, or by telephone. On rare occasions the dances were by special invitation, but most of the time everyone who met certain standards of conduct was invited (some came who did not). Often they included the people in a very small area, people from adjoining farms or ranches, who usually could attend the dance and go home the same evening. The "all night dances" brought people from such a broad geographical area that they could not return home the same night. Entire families came, mainly by wagon or buggy, a few by car, others on horseback.[40]

These were great social events, for some people the biggest social events of their lives. Since the adults did not sleep at these dances, the beds became the "baby sitters": little children were put there to sleep until morning. The Wills family joked that Luther J. was different from the rest of the family, Jim Rob explaining in jest that his mother "got Luke by mistake when she picked up the wrong baby" at one of these affairs. The older children played in a designated area, while the teenagers often danced and socialized; some met and courted their future spouses there. The older men stayed outdoors when they were not dancing. Whiskey stills were quite common, and some of the men consumed the "good whiskey" they produced. Intoxication, however, was not the norm. It was frowned on by nearly everyone because it led to fighting, which spoiled everybody's fun. Actually, according to Emmaline Wills, there was hardly any fighting at West Texas dances, compared to those in the Brazos country.[41] While the men socialized outside, the women visited inside, gossiping and discussing the usual feminine subjects, such as children, canning, and sewing. The women never entered into the drinking of alcoholic beverages. This was the time of the women's rights movement, but the "right" of drinking on an equal basis with men was not discussed or practiced openly, even if some bolder women did so surreptitiously. Both Ruby and Eloise remarked that they "never saw a woman take a drink at a country dance."[42]

If the women had not been liberated in that respect, they were at least freed from the cooking chores. This was especially true at ranch dances,

where the cowboys did the cooking.[43] They were experts at barbecuing. Beef was, of course, their specialty, but pork ribs and chicken were prepared also, along with pinto beans, potatoes, pickles, and relishes. A midnight meal served by the cowboys gave the musicians and dancers a break and also tended to have a sobering effect on those who overfrequented the wagons containing corn whiskey.

When the Wills family played for these dances (and they played for many in the Memphis area), John Wills, as the fiddler, was always the dominant musician and often the most popular person at the dance. The fiddler, as one old-timer who used to play with John put it, "always got all of the money."[44] Jim Rob played mandolin, and either Ruby or Eloise played the piano, if the host owned one. On occasion, one of the girls would play guitar, or Eloise might second on the mandolin. While the mandolin, guitar, and piano provided rhythm, John Wills took the melody.[45] He demanded a dance beat. Later Jim Rob demanded this beat from his own musicians, and one reason he knew it so well was that he had first learned to play rhythm rather than melody.[46] When Jim Rob did begin to fiddle, he, like his father, carried the melody, which is what people at these dances expected of the fiddler. Unlike other fiddlers he later hired, such as Jesse Ashlock and Joe Holley, Wills never played jazz choruses or "take-off fiddle." Though Wills admired this style, he could never play it.[47] Neither could his younger brother, Johnnie Lee, who went through this same sort of musical training.[48]

John Wills played many of the traditional tunes that had been handed down from fiddler to fiddler as the frontier moved westward: "The Eighth of January," "Hell among the Yearlings," "Sally Goodin," "Done Gone," "Gone Indian," "Lost Chief," "Billy in the Low Ground," "Prosperity Special," "Stone Rag," "Waltz in D," "Put Your Little Foot."[49] One popular tune at these dances was a selection called "All Night Long." Someone asked Tom Wills, who often was the principal fiddler or played while his son, John, took a break, if he could play "All Night Long." "Hell, no!" he protested, "I can't play till midnight!"[50] Another favorite, which Jim Rob and John Wills wrote, was the blues-type fiddle tune "Faded Love." Ruby loved for her father to play it: "It was slow and I could rest my fingers at the piano."[51] Lorene, the youngest daughter, remembered being awakened at all hours of the night by the lonesome melody of "Faded Love": "When Papa could not sleep or was worried, he played it."[52]

The dancing itself took place in one or several rooms in the house. Since amplification was unheard of then, the musicians had to be so situated as to allow the dancers to hear the music. Usually, they played in a place where three or four rooms came together. If they played in a doorway they could often face the two "main rooms"; coverage in a third room would be fair, but it was difficult to play for dancing in four or more

rooms.[53] If the crowd was large, as it often was at ranch dances, only a portion of them could dance at any one time. A procedure evolved by which each man was "put on a set" along with three other men. Every time their set came up, they and their partners occupied a main room for dancing. It was a colorful scene as one dance ended, and the host, or someone designated as the bookkeeper, called out the next set, in a stentorian voice. "Squab Rucktassel, Jody Keck, Chunky Lee, and Heavy Lamascus," he would announce. To the chagrin of the bookkeeper, men often traded sets. If a fellow saw that a square dance was coming up, he might trade his place in the square dance with a man whose name was farther down the list, in order to get a slower, more cheek-to-cheek dance with his favorite girl.[54]

The set was an important matter to the Wills family, because it was directly related to the pay they received for playing. Often a man paid fifty cents to be included on a set, which entitled him and his partner to dance whenever their set came up. If there were many dancers, his set might come up very few times during the evening. Another means of paying the fiddler and determining who would dance was to charge twenty-five or fifty cents each time a person danced. With this arrangement, one could dance a good deal more if he had the means. Still a third way of determining the sets was to allow a man's name to appear on more sets if he paid handsomely, one or two or even five dollars. This aristocratic procedure was rarely used since it ran against the egalitarian grain of West Texans. Similarly, years later, Jim Rob would not allow a kitty as a means of requesting selections. He felt all dancers should be treated as equals; money made no difference.[55] In any event, at the ranch dances the musicians received all the money, regardless of the way it was collected. The Wills family rarely, if ever, played for a guarantee. They made from ten to thirty-five dollars for an evening or a night. The most the oldest Wills daughter could remember their receiving was on a Christmas Eve and Christmas Night in Lakeview, when she and her father (the rest of the family was in East Texas) made seventy-five dollars for the two nights.[56] A decade and a half later, Jim Rob followed the family procedure by working on a percentage.

It was at one of these dances that Jim Rob first played the fiddle in public. The year was 1915, and he was ten years old. This occasion came quite by accident. John Wills was scheduled to play for a dance at a nearby ranch and had sent Jim Rob ahead with the instruments. When it was time for the dance to begin, John Wills had not appeared. At first, Jim Rob thought the creeks might have been impassable due to recent rains or that the elder Wills forgot. In any case, the ten-year-old boy faced a large crowd that was ready to dance—with nothing to dance to. As the embarrassed rancher and the visitors began to murmur, young Jim Rob smiled weakly

and assured them, "Papa will be here any minute."[57] Papa still did not appear, so Jim Rob asked permission to play the few tunes he knew. The cowboys and their ladies were amused at the young fiddler, but soon they were dancing. Jim Rob played the six selections he knew until two o'clock the next morning. Papa finally showed up but had frequented the corn-liquor wagons too much to play.[58]

His son, however, had fulfilled a family dream—he had been a success as a fiddler playing his first dance. It is an incredible fact that he would provide dance music for the next fifty-five years, and in 1969, the last year he played for dances, he still broke attendance records during a tour in California. From the horse and buggy to the moon landing, from the telephone to television, from a rural to an urban society, from World War I to Viet Nam, from Woodrow Wilson to Richard Nixon, few people, musicians or otherwise, ever appealed to the public over such a vast and changing period of history. How he and his music could appeal to people for more than half a century is a human as well as a musical enigma.

1. Gertrude Wills Fowler; Maggie Wills Baker; Finis E. Wills; Ida Foley Walker; Wenonah Foley Whitaker; Son Lansford; Ruby Wills Sullivan; Betty Wills; Eloise Wills House; Bob Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; Jennie McKenzie; J. S. Wills to Dr. S. H. Wills, Nov. 22, 1876; William Levitt to Dr. S. H. Wills, Jan. 11, 1878; William Levitt to Dr. J. H. Wills, Aug. 2, 1879; William Levitt to Dr. [J. H.] Wills, Aug. 27, 1879; J. C. Chandler to Dr. S. H. Wills, Mar. 29, 1880; William Levitt to Dr. S. H. Wills, Aug. 1, 1881. See also legal and professional papers of Dr. S. H. Wills in my files and *Handbook of Texas,* ed. Walter Prescott Webb and H. Bailey Carroll (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1952), II, 919–920.

2. Ruth Sheldon, *Hubbin' It: The Life of Bob Wills* (Tulsa: Privately published, 1938), pp. 4–8; Finis E. Wills; Gertrude Wills Fowler; Maggie Wills Baker; Ida Foley Walker; Bob Wills; Son Lansford; Sleepy Johnson; Herman Arnspiger; Johnnie Lee Wills; Jesse Ashlock.

3. See chap. 3, "Frontier Voices," in Irving L. Sablosky, *American Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), pp. 35–52. See also Bill C. Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.: A Fifty-Year History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), pp. 13, 25.

4. I am indebted to Bill C. Malone for bringing this phrase to my attention.

5. Sablosky, *American Music,* p. 42.

6. Malone, *Country Music,* p. 26.

7. By the term *frontier fiddle music* I mean the tunes that were handed down from fiddler to fiddler and taken across the nation as the frontiers moved westward. The tunes were popular in rural areas long after the frontier ended around 1890. See Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," *Annual Report for the Year 1893* (Washington: American Historical Association, 1894), pp. 199–227. Bob Wills not only played frontier music throughout his career, he also imposed a frontier fiddle style on music that was not necessarily folk.

8. Bob Wills; Jennie McKenzie; Johnnie Lee Wills; Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* pp. 13–16.

9. Bob Wills.

10. Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House; Bob Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills.

11. O. W. Mayo; Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House.

12. Bob Wills.

13. Ibid.; Ray DeGeer; Sleepy Johnson; Woodie Wood; George Balay; Wayne Johnson; Danny Alguire; Smokey Dacus. Listen also to my comments on *A Tribute to Bob,* United Artists SP–105.

14. Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House.

15. Bob Wills.

16. See Sablosky's chapter "Shaping New Forms" in *American Music,* pp. 111–132. See also Gilbert Chase, chap. 23, "Singin' the Blues," in *America's Music: From the Pilgrims to the Present,* 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), pp. 448–464.

17. See, e.g., Morton White, *Social Thought in America: The Revolt against Formalism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957).

18. Smokey Dacus.

19. In a few cases, cotton pickers were paid by the day, but in most instances they were paid a set price for every 100 pounds they picked.

20. Bob Wills. Listen to my comments on *A Tribute to Bob.*

21. Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House.

22. Bob Wills.

23. Emmaline Wills evidently held a very low opinion of blacks and doubtless expressed the attitude of many whites in the camp. When she caught Jim Rob rolling two stones, snapping his fingers, and moaning as if he were shooting dice, she explained how wicked this act was and asked, "Do you want to be a nigger?" According to Wills's sisters and his son, James Robert Wills II, Emmaline's prejudice did not make much of an impression on Jim Rob. The blacks did impress him, and both his music and his speech always reflected their influence. Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House; James Robert Wills II; Johnnie Lee Wills. See also Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* p. 13.

24. Bob Wills; Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House. We need a scholarly study of the development of wagon yards as economic and social institutions.

25. Ibid.

26. Bob Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; Rip Ramsey.

27. Jennie McKenzie; Bob Wills. The McKenzies, who were related to the Foleys, had also migrated from Limestone County.

28. Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House; Bob Wills.

29. According to Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* p. 17, Wills first went to Friendship School. Ruby Wills Sullivan and Eloise Wills House said they all attended their first school at Newlin.

30. Bob Wills.

31. E.g., "Strictly by Ear," *Time,* Feb. 11, 1946, p. 50.

32. Johnnie Lee Wills; Bob Wills; Ruby Wills Sullivan.

33. Wills discussed the incident and played this first violin tune on *Bob Wills Keepsake Album No. 1,* Longhorn LP–001. See also Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* pp. 16–17.

34. Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House.

35. Ruby Wills Sullivan; Bob Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; Luke Wills; Eloise Wills House.

36. Eloise Wills House; Bob Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; Ruby Wills Sullivan; Lorene Wills Burton; John Luther Garner.

37. Ibid.

38. Though Bob Wills sometimes used the terms *country dance* and *ranch dance* interchangeably, he appeared to make a distinction between the East Texas country dance, held at farms, and the West Texas ranch dance, held at ranches. Listen especially to his interesting interview with Hank Penny.

39. For discussions of these dances, listen to Bob Wills; Herman Arnspiger; Rip Ramsey; Watt Rice; Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House; Johnnie Lee Wills; Dewitt Huffines; Othel Stubb; Laverne Simmons Barnhill; Harold Ham; Ruby Cushenberry; Bryant Eddleman; Mrs. Bryant Eddleman; Mrs. Wayne Hackerson; Dan Gibson; John Luther Garner. For background see Lloyd Shaw, *Cowboy Dances* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1939).

40. Lorene Wills Burton; Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House; John Luther Garner. See especially Eleanor Mitchell Traweek, *Of Such Things: A History of Motley County* (Quanah, Tex.: Nortex Press, 1973), p. 188.

41. Bob Wills; John Luther Garner.

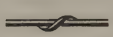
42. Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House; John Luther Garner.

43. Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House.

44. Watt Rice. Rice played guitar with the elder Wills at country dances and later seconded Bob when he played on the streets of Lakeview for just tips.
45. Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House.
46. Herman Arnspiger.
47. Sleepy Johnson; Jesse Ashlock; Leon McAuliffe.
48. Johnnie Lee Wills.
49. Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House; Bob Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; John Luther Garner.
50. Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House.
51. Ibid.
52. Lorene Wills Burton. Listen also to my comments on *A Tribute to Bob.*
53. Rip Ramsey was helpful in this discussion of the country dance. He grew up on a farm near the Willses and played dances with Johnnie Lee in the area. He was too young to play with Bob and John Wills at the time, but was later a member of Bob's Texas Playboys.
54. Watt Rice; Sleepy Johnson; Herman Arnspiger; Rip Ramsey; Johnnie Lee Wills; Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House; Ruby Cushenberry; Bryant Eddleman; Mrs. Bryant Eddleman; Mrs. Wayne Hackerson; Ed House; Ruth House; Lawrence Hedrick; Mrs. C. J. Condrap; Dewitt Huffines; Othel Stubb.
55. Al Stricklin; Smokey Dacus; Johnnie Lee Wills; Bob Wills; Ida Foley Walker. See especially Charles R. Townsend, "A Personal Memoir: Bob Wills," *Country Music,* 3, no. 12 (Sept., 1975), 68.
56. Ruby Wills Sullivan.
57. Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* pp. 18–19.
58. Bob Wills.

2

Down between the Rivers



I got my musical style down between the rivers.
Bob Wills

Times were hard for pioneer farmers and their families. Though he was never a very successful farmer, John Wills did have a few lucrative crops in the years just after Jim Rob played his first dance. In 1919, while they still lived on the Ogden Ranch, cotton brought $200 a bale, and they harvested a hundred bales. The family lived high for a little while. They had plenty of good food and new clothes, and they even went to town for movies and other recreation. John Wills decided to quit renting and buy his own place. He made a down payment on a six-hundred-acre combination farm and ranch between Big Red River and Little Red River, about midway between Turkey and Lakeview near Oxbow Crossing.[1] This farm "down between the rivers," as the Wills family still nostalgically refers to it, held a special place in their lives: they were all together there longer than anywhere else.[2] Moreover, as poor people, they took great pride in "owning a farm." Actually, they never owned it; it was still unpaid for when they left West Texas in 1931.[3]

When they first moved between the rivers in late 1921 or early 1922, they lived in the cotton shacks the former owner had erected for the migrant cotton pickers he employed—the same kind of cotton shanties they had lived in while en route from East to West Texas nearly a decade before. During the first year on the farm, John Wills, his son-in-law (Ruby married in 1922), and others built a house on the east side of the property just behind a grove of trees. For its day it was a fine home, with three bedrooms, a kitchen, a storage room, and a living room which was also used as a bedroom. They painted it bright yellow. Though time has dimmed its brightness, some of the original paint is still visible.[4]

A bright yellow house was not really conducive to one of their purposes in moving to this new farm. Ever since they arrived in West Texas, the Wills family had never been able to be alone. If they were not playing

dances, someone was "always wanting us to play for them," one of the older daughters said. "Papa moved down between the rivers so we could be hid and far enough away that we could be alone as a family."[5] But the very first night they occupied the new house, a group of men rode by, discovered who they were, and asked them to play. "The horseback riders never got off of their horses, and we played for them until way into the night."[6] One of those riders was L. D. House from Turkey, who later married Eloise.

The Wills farm produced as much music as it did cotton and cattle. There were usually visitors there, and they always wanted to hear some music. One woman who dated Jim Rob while they were in their teens and early twenties said she used to go with "Jim Bob," as she called him, to the farm on Sunday. "John Wills would get all the family together and play me a concert. Mr. Wills or Jim Bob played the violin, Eloise played the piano, and Ruby and Johnnie Lee played guitars."[7] On rare occasions even "Aunt Emma," as friends referred to Emmaline Wills, would play the piano a little. Johnnie Lee remarked, "Our house was always a place where we could bring our friends and they felt welcome. Papa would always play for them."[8] The family may have intended to escape from the public, but they never did. They frequently held country dances in their house. One woman remembered dancing there many times. "I've seen them move the furniture out of these four rooms into the kitchen and onto the porch," she said, as she conducted an informal tour through the old home, "and dance in all four rooms."[9]

The dances in the Wills home had as much economic as social value, since the additional money helped support the family. By 1926 there were nine children. When Ruby's husband was killed in a car wreck a few years after they married, Ruby and her two children moved home. This made eleven children, plus John and Emma, plus other needy relatives whom they took in at various times.[10] It was therefore a struggle to feed and clothe such a large family and make mortgage payments on the property. John Wills kept nearly all of the 600 acres in cotton. Johnnie Lee said, disgustedly, "If a mule could get over it, Papa planted it in cotton."[11] There were some good years when they made as much as a bale to the acre.[12] But expenses were high. One year John Wills "bought forty Mexicans to help work the crop. That's what they called it. He bought them for forty dollars apiece."[13] Ordinarily, migrant Negroes and whites were employed to help with the work, but most of it was done by the Wills children.

When asked what they remembered most about their lives in the John Wills home, a daughter and a niece replied, "Hubbin' it, hard times." The hubbin' it they could have endured if they were making money and improving their lot. But they were doing neither. Recessions after World War I and overproduction drove the price of cotton down to almost nothing. At times it was not even profitable to harvest it. One of the first

falls they were on the new farm they turned away the tramp cotton pickers and plowed up sixty bales of the best cotton they ever raised. All John Wills could do was borrow money and hope for better luck the next year.[14]

As the oldest child, Jim Rob perhaps saw what the other children could not see then, that neither they nor their parents had any future as farmers. At the time he did not think he wanted a career as a musician either. It would have been different had the family only played dances and not had to keep a farm going at the same time. But they often worked all day in the cotton fields, then drove several miles to a dance, often in a buggy, then played most of the night, and drove back home. They got very little sleep, sometimes none at all, before they went back to the fields. It was especially hard for them at planting and harvesting time. In disgust Jim Rob would tell his family, "When I grow up, I'll never, never play another dance." He later claimed he did not really mean this. But working all day and playing most of the night—working all night, in effect—had taken the fun out of playing dances. Half a century later, as he looked at dancers from his bandstand, he could say, "That just shows you, you shouldn't say 'never.' "[15] But at the time, Jim Rob found those years frustrating and uncertain. When the family moved to the rivers, he was nearly seventeen years old. He had very little education and faced a farmer's life of hard work, poverty, and disappointment. He had had just enough success in music to give him confidence that he could do better, though he did not think he could ever make an adequate living from it.[16]

He had already assumed he would have to help support his family indefinitely. He never resented this, at least not as long as they tried to help themselves. Throughout his entire life he supported them fully or in part, with alacrity.[17] The desire to see members of his family happy was a ruling passion of his life. He sensed that his father could never adequately provide, regardless of how hard he worked. It would always be a bare existence at best. As the oldest child, James Robert had responsibilities thrust upon him that caused him to mature much earlier than most boys his age. Yet these burdens were far greater than his ability to cope with them. Rather than try to meet an obligation he knew he could not adequately handle with his education and training, he ran away from it.

Jim Rob had no one he felt he could ask for counseling. A field hand, Old Man Bridges, called Jim Rob over to him in the field one day and gave him some unsolicited advice. The old fellow raised his bare foot, calloused from years of working in cotton fields, struck a match on his sole, and lit his pipe. Philosophically, Bridges said, "Jim Rob! Look at this old head—bald as a rat. Look at these feet—tough as whip leather from bumpin' clods all my life. Son don't you stay here on the farm, or it'll happen to you. You go away. There ain't nuthin to be got from a life like this." He then said, "Yore young. Yore smart, Jim Rob. You go do sumpin' else. Don't you tell yore pappy I'm tellin' you this. Don't you tell him, but you go way."[18]

Jim Rob must have thought that he was destined to end up like the old man if he stayed on the farm, for he decided that day to leave home. Without telling his mother and father, he caught a freight train to Mexia in East Texas. He was five hundred miles from home, penniless, and already homesick for his family. At first, he could not even find work so he could eat. He hopped another freight to Farrar, where he visited relatives. They borrowed a fiddle for him, and he made five dollars playing at a dance. With a good night's rest, food in his stomach, and five dollars in his pocket, he caught a freight going west. He got off in Knox County, not too far from home. Hungry and broke again, he began working in the wheat harvest. His description of the avarice and inhumanity of the farmers in that area sounds like something from Upton Sinclair's *Jungle.* One man worked him until he keeled over, then fired him for being too small to work.[19]

Not all the farmers in Knox County were of this nature. Roscoe Partridge hired him to "pitch wheat," and Wills, determined not to lose another job, began to work with the same speed as when he fainted a few days before. Partridge said, "Listen, son, there ain't no point in workin' so hard. Now, take it easy. You'll get more work done in the long run. I ain't goin' to have you kill yourself workin' for me."[20] Partridge and his wife showed a concern for Jim Rob as they would have for their own son. They took him to Sunday school and church regularly. Jim Rob was impressed with their religion, especially the simple way they worshipped their God and practiced their faith by kindness to their neighbors. Jim Rob joined the Baptist church they attended and in a few weeks felt the call of God to preach the gospel. The Partridges offered to send him to the newly founded Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, but Jim Rob decided not to accept.[21] He was never completely satisfied with this decision and always wondered if he had made a mistake in not going to the seminary and, especially, in not heeding "God's call to preach." Years later he rented the Memorial Auditorium in Wichita Falls and played a free concert in honor of the Partridges. He told the audience that his stay in the Partridge home was the best period of his life.[22]

Jim Rob reluctantly said good-bye to the Partridges. He still wanted to roam, but he was homesick, too. It had been several months since he had seen his family, and leaving the Partridges made his homesickness more acute. He hitchhiked to Wichita Falls, then with a young man he met there, decided to catch a freight going west. They stood along the tracks just on the outskirts of town, and when the train passed, Jim Rob's new friend grabbed the ladder in proper hobo fashion and with little effort climbed to the top of a boxcar. Jim Rob caught the ladder too low and could not pull himself up. By then the train was moving too fast for him to jump off. His grip weakened quickly; his fingers grew numb as he tried to chin himself up on the ladder. His companion, holding to the top of the ladder, dropped his body down and shouted, "Grab my legs and swing to the

coupling." Rob swung too far, and when he let the boy's legs go, too much of his body went over the coupling, and his head nearly hit the roadbed before he finally got safely on the coupling. The friend got him to the top of the car, and Jim Rob, out of breath and trembling from fear and exhaustion, remarked, "I sure thought I was a goner."[23] The two young travelers joined sixty-four other men in a filthy flatcar. They had to get off in Childress and circle town so the railroad dicks would not catch them. It looked like a latter-day hippie commune as all sixty-six of them waited by the tracks on the west side of Childress. They did not know it, but the police were waiting in a grove of trees, watching their every move. When the train puffed by, everyone—hobos and police—moved for the boxcars. All but one of the hobos got on board. Jim Rob Wills ran from the tracks with nine policemen and a bulldog after him. He made a perfect decoy, but the police quickly gave up pursuing him and went after those in the train. Jim Rob caught a ride in Childress, and as the automobile he was in slowly moved toward Estelline and home, he saw his erstwhile fellow travelers, more than sixty of them, walking along the railroad tracks. The authorities had made the railroad bums get off.

Memphis looked good to Jim Rob after a few months' absence. It was good to have people speak to him, people he and his family had known for years. When he arrived at Lakeview, just nine miles from Memphis, it was almost like being home. He had played many dances there and had played on the street in front of the barbershop for what tips he could make. About two miles beyond Lakeview, he turned left onto the Turkey road, less than fifteen miles from home. When he came to the hill north of Big Red River, he got his first glimpse of the farm. In a few minutes he was across the river and home. Everything looked the same between the rivers. The family was in good health and warmly welcomed the prodigal home. But after the first few days of reunion, Jim Rob was more dissatisfied than before he went away. John Wills was again living on borrowed money, waiting for spring and hoping for a good cotton crop. Same old futility. There were six children and another on the way. Jim Rob's presence would only be an added burden. Still, he stayed until cotton-picking time in the fall of 1923. He helped with the family crop and made seventeen dollars picking cotton for fifty cents a day at Quitaque.[24]

When Jim Rob first arrived home, in the late winter of 1922 and early spring of 1923, he began to shun his old friends. The boys he had roamed the river bottoms and hills with and gone to ball games and dances with could not understand what had happened to him. He feared they might lead him astray from the religious principles he learned and appreciated so much while he lived with the Partridges. Above all, he wanted to shun dances, where he knew drunkenness and fighting could prevail. He eventually agreed to go to a dance, but only as a spectator. To be certain he

would remain a spectator, he wore his overalls, no slicking up, no polishing. Before long the West Texas girls and the music were too much for him; despite the overalls, he became a participant. He loved the companionship of the girls, and it was good to hear fiddle music again. He had not played or heard one in several months. Before the evening was over, he danced with most of the girls there and had a great time. Although for the rest of his life, according to members of his bands and family, he was a "religious man,"[25] practicing a great deal of the religious philosophy he had learned, especially charity to the unfortunate, one thing was certain that night—he was not likely to become a parson.

After Christmas, Jim Rob went to look for a job in Amarillo, where his sister Ruby and her husband were living. When he could find no employment of any kind, he borrowed eight dollars from his brother-in-law and bought shoe-shining equipment. For two days he stooped over his chair to shine shoes and boots. The barber in charge of the shop where Jim Rob was working cursed him when he asked for enough of his pay to get by on for a few days. Wills walked out. He then started to join the United States Navy but got scared and backed out before signing on the final dotted line.

A few days later, he literally stole a job as a construction worker and helped build what is now the Amarillo Smelting Company.[26] After borrowing tools and a carpenter's apron from a friend of Ruby's, he lined up with the workers each day as if he had been officially hired. A new timekeeper assumed he was hired and took his name with the others, and he began to earn from $4.50 to $6.00 a day. He worked steadily for six months and was making more money than he ever dreamed he could earn. A few weeks passed, and he paid all his debts, bought new clothes, and sent money to help the family on the farm. He bought a violin from a pawnshop and began playing dances on Saturday nights. He played with various musicians, most often with Buck Holligan and Dutch Milton.[27] During that period James Robert made his radio debut, on two early Amarillo stations, KGRS and WDAG.[28] He was happier than he had been since he left the Partridge farm. Nevertheless, there was still that urge to roam, an urge that was with Wills most of his life. Foolishly, he left his job at the smelter and went with a cousin to pick cotton in Knox County. It was especially foolish because he had been able to send money to his family, the very thing he wanted most to do. One reason he went to Knox County was to see the Partridges again. But after three days in the cotton patch, he returned to Amarillo, and the only thing that got him his job back was the kindness of Lawrence Hedrick, the foreman.[29]

In 1925, Jim Rob left the smelter once more and returned to the farm, which his father was glad to turn over to him. Again down between the rivers, Jim Rob began to play dances with the family. He had a Model T Ford and traveled sixty miles or more to play ranch dances. However, he

fell into the old pattern of working all day on the farm and playing the fiddle and traveling most of the night. A girl friend of the period remembered many occasions when they left the farm in the late afternoon and drove to Oklahoma or places in West Texas, played dances, and returned to the farm at four or five in the morning. "I've slept many a night with Eloise in this room after we came from one of those dances," she said. "Jim Bob sometimes made only ten dollars for his effort." Another source said he received only three or four dollars, while others said he sometimes made twenty-five dollars and more.[30]

The urge to roam overcame him once again, and he went to East Texas in the summer of 1925 to visit relatives. One relative after another invited him to visit, always adding, "But bring your fiddle." He resented this in a way, for he wanted people to accept him as a person, not merely as an entertainer. The Wills and Foley families' reputations were so well known that many people wanted to hear the grandson from faraway West Texas play. Jim Rob probably played more dances in a shorter period of time than he ever had in his life. In fact, he played so much he bruised his chin, and after it was lanced, he continued to play until it was dangerously infected. Doctors finally had to scrape the bone, and he bore the scars for the rest of his life.

While in East Texas, Jim Rob got other scars, though not physically permanent ones. He agreed to play in one of those "tough towns" his mother had told him about. A big crowd showed up and was having a good time. Some, who were drinking too much, were determined to cause trouble. Someone turned the lights out, and several people fired guns into the air. Fortunately, no one was hurt. Jim Rob began to see that the "wild and wooly West" was not nearly as rough and tough as East Texas. He and his musicians prepared to leave, demanding their money. The cashier refused to pay them and warned, "Anybody who tries to get out of here is going to get his!"[31] The lights went out again, and fights broke out everywhere. Jim Rob saw a knife flash in the moonlight; it was in the hand of the cashier, who slashed Jim Rob's arm from the elbow to the wrist. Wills hit him with the other arm as he jumped into the musicians' moving car and escaped with his life.

James Robert returned home by the cotton harvest in the fall of 1925. John Wills and his family continued to play for country dances, mainly at ranches in the area. Their reputation had spread, and they were often invited to play as far away as the 6666 Ranch in Guthrie and the Matador Ranch at Matador. The Christmas and New Year season was an especially lucrative time for them. Those dances came at a time when they needed the money and when farm work had slacked off.[32]

James Robert ran hot and cold; he was either the biggest blessing to the family or its worst blight. He worked hard, was kind to his family, and

sent them money from Amarillo and other places. On the other hand, he had changed a great deal from the young gentleman he was when he lived with the Partridges. He had developed a reputation for excesses of all kinds, for drifting and hoboing, for drinking, gambling, fighting, and general irresponsibility. Ruth Sheldon told how Jim Rob got two other young musicians to go with him to the boom town of Borger in 1926. They left on a Sunday with only a few dollars between them. About fifty miles from home, near Goodnight, they ruined a tire. After a service station attendant refused to accept a bogus check, Jim Rob jacked up one of the cars parked near a church and was about to steal a tire, when his friends, fearing a telegraph operator had called the constable, picked him up. Just out of town, the constable waved them off the road and accused them of stealing. Jim Rob jumped from the car and put on a hypocritical display of righteous indignation. The only thing that saved them from prosecution was that the constable had heard Jim Rob play. "Why Jim Rob," he said, "I know you. Don't you remember me? You played for Old Man Goodnight's birthday dance and every drink you had I give to you." He warned the boys and let them go. They finally got to Borger, but the oil-field workers were too busy "digging for black gold" to dance. At least they did not appear to care for Jim Rob's music. His two friends gave up and went home; after two weeks, so did he.[33]

Jim Rob seemed determined to continue his rebellious life. Once he traded two of his father's best milk cows for a racehorse a Mexican brought by the farm and claimed was very fast. John Wills was furious. He tried to point out the seriousness of the situation, explaining that the cows were mortgaged. Jim Rob refused to listen and argued that he could do nothing further about the trade. Anyway, he had his head set on making a great deal of money racing the animal. Jim Rob named him Butler and began "training" him to run. When the foreman and cowboys from the neighboring Letts Ranch heard Rob brag about his horse's speed, they matched the foreman's paint horse against Old Butler.[34] They put an experienced rider on the paint and lightened his load by having their jockey ride bareback. Jim Rob made the mistake of riding Old Butler with a stock saddle. Wills and Butler were badly outrun. Jim Rob took the horse to other races and county fairs and ended up losing all his money and even his saddle. He finally traded Butler for a "very poor mare and a good saddle."[35]

Sometime later, he attended a matched horse race in Memphis. There were many fine and fast quarter horses in West Texas by that time, such as John Wilkins, by Peter McQue, owned by the neighboring JA Ranch and sire of the famous Joe Hancock.[36] West Texans loved fine horses, took racing seriously, and made a big social event of such gatherings. On this occasion a local stallion was matched with a horse owned by a fellow coming through the community. These fellows who "just happened" to be coming

through often *happened* to have very fast horses. Memphisites knew this. Their stallion was unruly and bucked off two or three would-be jockeys. When Jim Rob recognized him as Old Butler, he took a firm hand with him, spoke to him in a familiar voice, and calmed him down. Jim Rob then rode him to victory in the race that afternoon.

When an acquaintance saw Jim Rob astride the horse that had just bucked others off, he asked, "Are you drunk, Jim Rob?" The man was probably only making conversation, but he had hit upon another excess, one which caused Wills and his family a good deal of grief not only at that time, but for the rest of his life. Jim Rob began to drink heavily while still in his teens. His family and friends remembered that he would get drunk and climb on his horse and ride for hours, often riding at a full run into the wind. Most of the other excesses of these years, the rowdiness, fighting, gambling, restlessness and drifting, and irresponsibility, passed with his youth. But not drinking. Because it was a problem for the rest of his life, it demands attention here. It was the part of his life that, as tragic as it was, has been most exaggerated and misunderstood. Many of his most ardent and admiring fans have believed that he drank all the time and on occasion drank too much. As a matter of record Wills could never drink without drinking too much. Those closest to him said that if he ever took one drink, "he could not stop until he pulled a good one."[37] Sometimes he would go for weeks, months, or even years without a drink. For example, Leon McAuliffe, who was with him nearly every night between 1935 and 1938, said that he went three years without drinking. But once started, he could not stop until he was intoxicated, and it took him two or three days, and on some occasions two or three weeks, to get over it.[38]

When Wills could not appear at dances due to his drinking, his band members often told the people he had the flu or that he was sick.[39] This led to unfortunate and unwarranted assumptions on the part of the fans. Even if he were really sick, they assumed he was drunk again. When he was on the bandstand and was hollering and having a good time—and he did this only when the music was especially pleasing to him—some fans believed he was inebriated. His musicians stated that this was absolutely not true. Some said they never saw him on the bandstand intoxicated; others said they might have seen him in that condition before the public two or three times over a period of six or seven years. On a few occasions, especially in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Wills did perform while he was obviously drunk—a painful source of embarrassment to his band and, when he sobered up, to himself also. While such public episodes were very rare, there were enough of them to add to his already exaggerated image as an excessive drinker.[40]

This is not to suggest that he did not miss engagements because of drinking; he missed many over the years. But when he was in no condition to appear, he generally stayed away with the "flu." Perhaps it was too much

to expect the public to understand the drinking problem of a famous personality. Now his drinking habits would be described as those of a periodic drunkard. There was no regularity or pattern to them. It was probably a sickness that he had from his youth on. At times it was worse; at others it was nonexistent. This problem of periodic drinking was probably the greatest tragedy of his life. It handicapped him and robbed him of musical opportunities and achievements he doubtless deserved. The really remarkable thing is how well he did in spite of it.

Aside from his drinking, Jim Rob's conduct in this period is difficult to explain in relation to the rest of his life. He was always a person who gave to other people; yet in the attempted stealing of the tire, the trading of his father's cows, and in his life in general in the early 1920s, he was taking from others and not considering how he hurt them. He did all this without the least apparent burden to his conscience. As much as he loved and respected his mother, her tears did not appear to change him. She remarked that of all her children, he caused her more sorrow than any other.[41] Yet he did more than any other person for her and the family. Smokey Dacus, who knew him for more than thirty-five years, said, "He is the most totally unselfish human I've ever known." Some who knew Wills much more intimately than Dacus did would question such a laudative expression. They knew him as an impetuous and impulsive person who often failed to consider how his decisions and actions would affect other people, bringing misery and unhappiness to himself and often to those closest to him.[42]

Between 1921 and 1926, especially, Jim Rob could not find himself. In these years, he was a musician, hobo, farmer, itinerant farm worker, preacher, shine boy, carpenter, salesman, construction worker, and almost a sailor in the United States Navy. Was it the hard times? Was it the revolt against his own poverty and lack of training? Was it guilt growing out of a conflict between his conduct and his religious philosophy? Was it frustration growing out of hard work and little achievement? Was it the knowledge of his inability to meet responsibilities he regarded as his own? Or was it, as his youngest sister and two nieces believed, that he wanted to be a musician and was floundering until he found himself in his musical career?[43] They suggested this explanation without trying to justify his conduct. It is probably the most plausible one, though these other factors could also have been important. He had achieved some success and was making what for him was good money at the smelter plant. He was helping his family as he wanted to do. But regardless of what he tried, whether he had money or was in want, whether he was at home or wandering, he never was content until he quit everything else and became a musician.

In the fall of 1925, Jim Rob met a charming young lady in Lakeview and fell in love with her almost at once.[44] Edna Posey, reared in East Texas

and aged twenty-one, was visiting her brother, who owned the telephone company at Lakeview. Her brother's living quarters were at the back of the telephone office, and when Edna went in to relieve the regular operator at noon one day, there sat Jim Rob, "very relaxed, legs crossed, elbow on knee, chin in hand." After he left, she told the operator, "That's the man I'm going to marry." Later that day, Jim Rob told one of Edna's friends, "She's the girl I've been waiting for." And before the day ended Jim Rob and Edna had their first date. When her brother learned of this, he forbade it, telling her about Rob's reputation concerning women and his conduct in general—both very bad. Bob Beaman and others helped Edna and Rob slip around and see each other. In the summer of 1926, Edna moved to Canadian, Texas, to work. She could not return to Lakeview after her brother learned she was seeing Wills, but Jim Rob went to see her every chance he got. They were married in Canadian on August 21, 1926. They drove back to Bob and Flora Beaman's home in Memphis for a brief honeymoon, then moved to the farm between the rivers with the John Wills family. They cleaned up one of the old cotton shacks on the farm and made their first home there.

Edna Posey Wills began a love affair, not only with Jim Rob, but with all the Wills family, that would last as long as she lived. When she and Jim Rob married, he was twenty-one; Ruby, eighteen; Eloise, sixteen; Johnnie Lee, fourteen; Alga, eleven; Helen, nine; Luther J., five; Lorene, three; Billy Jack, six months.[45] "They were a close family. Jim Rob was fond of all of them, but he idolized his father known by most people as 'Uncle Johnnie.' 'Daddy-papa' as his grandchildren called him, was a big good natured guy, that left no doubt as to who was the head of the house," Edna wrote. "He didn't rule his kingdom with an iron hand, but with kindness and firmness. He never roared but his word was law. Mrs. Wills or 'Big Ma' was something else. A soft spoken woman, trusted everybody, and felt her family took advantage of her softness, and fussed and fussed. No one paid any attention to that fussing. Johnnie was her man and she worshipped the ground he walked on." The children, she added, "had great respect for their parents, there was no bickering. A happy family that never sat down to eat without a passel of outsiders." One trait this daughter-in-law so admired was their "quality of being good listeners. They would listen to someone tell something as if they had never heard it before, and they may have known it better than the one telling the story."[46]

In 1926, when Edna and Jim Rob moved between the rivers, music dominated life in both Jim Rob's and John Wills's home. "Musical instruments were never put up from the children, they might not last long, but they could all play something," Edna said. "Bob and his father would take cotton to the gin in the late afternoon. It would be late when they returned home and the rest of the family would be in bed. One of them would pick

up an instrument and start playing, next thing you knew the whole bunch, kids and all, would be up with an instrument in their hands. Someone would sit down to the piano, and the music would go on until the wee hours."[47]

Jim Rob and Edna lived on the Wills farm only a few weeks in the fall of 1926 before they moved to Sudan, Texas, where Jim Rob helped a cousin gather his crops. They were back between the rivers in their cotton shack by Christmas. Jim Rob and Buck Holligan of nearby Lakeview played several dances during that holiday season. According to Edna, her husband played much more with Holligan at that time than he did with his family. Ellie Holligan, Buck's sister, often joined them at these dances, adding another guitar.[48]

In the spring of 1927, Jim Rob and Edna leased a ranch between the rivers just across the road from his father's farm. The previous lessee wanted to move back to East Texas; Jim Rob bought his crop and he and Edna moved into the big house of the former headquarters of the Letts Ranch. "It was a big spread with bunk houses, corrals and cattle barns. Wild mares and a paint stallion still roamed the pastures. Living in the house was a hilarious experience. Hay was stored in some of the rooms, bull snakes had a field day hunting mice in the hay," Edna recalled. "Besides the crops, horses and cows, we acquired three goats, one pig, a flock of chickens, and two dogs. A bulldog and a Russian Wolfhound. The bulldog followed Jim Rob up and down the rows behind the cultivator. . . . The chickens strayed too far from the house and the coyotes caught them. The goats ate the garden, the corn and everything else in sight. . . ." On a moonlight night "they would play tag across the front porch. Jim Rob would chase them off, and they would just get out of his reach, stand and watch for him in his white B.V.D.'s to go back into the house and here they would come again." In June, 1927, their crops were hailed out. "Between the goats and the hail," Edna said, "there wasn't much left to hold us."[49]

Jim Rob decided to move to Amarillo. It was neither the hard work nor the disappointments of the farmer's life, however, that finally caused him to leave the farm forever. It was the love of music, the very thing his family had hoped he would cherish when he was still in the cradle in Limestone County. But the family never intended that the lad grow up and become merely a professional musician.

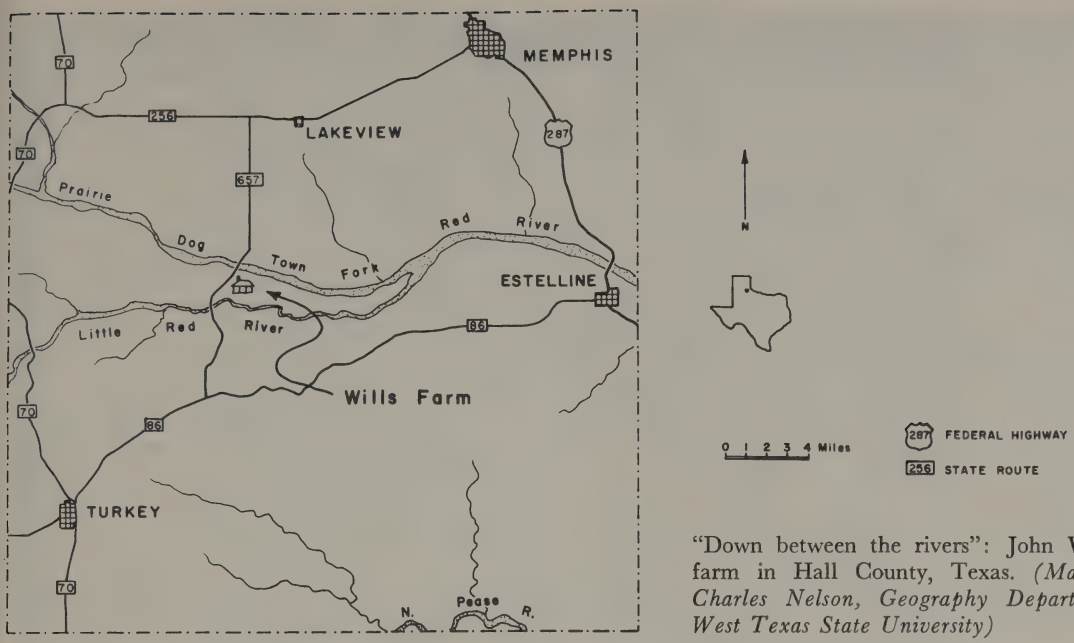
Nor did Jim Rob intend to make a career of music; perhaps the financial failure in Borger a year earlier made such a career look unpromising. Nevertheless, he knew his first loves were the fiddle and music. He always wore gloves to do farm work, but years of such work had already caused callouses to form on his hands, and he began to fear any labor that might injure his hands and impair the sensitivity of his fingers. He needed a profession in which he could protect his hands and yet have some time to

play his fiddle. When he first arrived in Amarillo in the summer of 1927, he got a job selling insurance for the American National Insurance Company. He came home at night and practiced selling insurance to Edna. But he was just no salesman. After considering several other jobs and professions, he reasoned that a barber's hands were always soft and cared for. One could learn barbering with only a seventh-grade education. Moreover, he could get into that profession and make money to support his family in a very short time. He entered Dendy's Barber College in Amarillo, completed the necessary schooling in a few months, and even took music lessons in his spare time.[50]

By the end of 1927, Jim Rob was barbering in Roy, New Mexico. There were some Indians and many Mexicans in the area, and he had difficulty communicating with some of them. For instance, a pretty young Mexican girl told him she wanted her hair cut "short." He interrogated her about what "short" meant and finally decided she meant what she said. She really meant "not very short." When Wills finished and she looked at his work, she was furious: the young barber had cut her hair like a boy's. That night he played a dance, and she was the only woman who showed up wearing a hat. All night she cast angry glances at him.

Jim Rob organized a band in Roy made up largely of Mexicans. Mexican fiddlers were so plentiful and excellent in that part of New Mexico that he often played drums: "I couldn't get anyone else to do it, so I did myself."[51] At first the people in New Mexico had difficulty dancing to Wills's music. This was a very isolated society, and their dancing (like other of their traits) was quite provincial. East and West Texans had always found his music very danceable. But not the New Mexicans. He finally told them to dance like they felt or wanted to, and he would try to fit the music to their dancing. They did an unusual dance, much like that of a prairie chicken.[52] Eventually Jim Rob came up with the right music, but it was difficult for him, because he was never very successful at improvising, anyway; it took him a long time to learn a tune, and then he played only the melody.

This whole experience in Roy was important for Jim Rob's musical career. First of all, it forced him to write a composition, which he later entitled "Spanish Two Step."[53] In the 1930s, he rearranged the notes in this piece into an American classic, the song that made him famous, "San Antonio Rose." The New Mexico period was also important because there he added a third folk music to his repertory, the Spanish or Mexican music of the Southwest.[54] It was never as significant as frontier fiddle music and Negro blues, but it was an ingredient in western swing. To appreciate its importance one need merely listen to the mariachi sounds in Wills's 1940 recording of "New San Antonio Rose."[55]



"Down between the rivers": John Wills's farm in Hall County, Texas. *(Map by Charles Nelson, Geography Department, West Texas State University)*

The John Wills home between the rivers near Turkey, Texas. *(Courtesy Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University)*

THE TEXAS PANHANDLE - 1885

The ranching country in which Jim Rob Wills grew to maturity. *(Courtesy Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, West Texas State University)*

XIT Western tier of counties. CAPITOL FREEHOLD LAND & INVESTMENT COMPANY, LTD. (British). Operated under lease by Capitol Syndicate, (American). Occupying in an irregular pattern a strip of country roughly 45 by 195 miles, its 3,000,000 acres nevertheless covered no more than 60% of the total acreage in this tier of counties, leaving large blocks of country for other brands, including LE, LIT and LS.

DIAMOND C Hansford County. JAMES H. CATOR, buffalo hunter from 1873 who stayed on as merchant and rancher.

VZ Hansford County. S. C. TYLER.

VP Hansford County. ROBERT CATOR.

THREE SEVEN Ochiltree County. BERRY AND BOICE.

LE Oldham and Hartley Counties. REYNOLDS BROTHERS.

LS Oldham County. LEE AND SCOTT, bought from Ellsworth Torrey in 1883.

FRYING PAN Potter and Randall Counties. GLIDDEN AND SANBORN.

LX Potter and Moore Counties. AMERICAN PASTORAL COMPANY, (British). Bought in 1884 from Bates and Beals, Bostonians who had established it in 1877.

LIT Oldham and Hartley Counties. PRAIRIE CATTLE COMPANY, LTD. (British). Bought in 1881 from George W. Littlefield from whose name the brand had been derived.

F or **LAZY F** Briscoe, Floyd and Hall Counties. The Quitaque Ranch. JOHN ADAIR, (British).

JA Armstrong, Briscoe, Donley and Hall Counties. JOHN ADAIR in partnership with CHARLES GOODNIGHT, with Goodnight as manager.

T-ANCHOR Randall County. CEDAR VALLEY LAND COMPANY, LTD. (British). Bought in 1882 from Gunter & Munson. Log cabin headquarters, built in 1878 by Leigh Dyer, now owned and preserved by West Texas State University as a part of its campus property.

MATADORS Floyd, Motley, Cottle and Dickens Counties. MATADOR LAND & CATTLE COMPANY, LTD. (British). H. H. Campbell, manager.

BOX T Lipscomb County. DOMINION CATTLE COMPANY, LTD. (British). Range extended over into Cherokee Strip.

SEVEN K Lipscomb County. YORK, DRAPER AND PARKER, Dodge City, Kansas.

DIAMOND F Carson, Gray and Roberts Counties. FRANKLYN CATTLE COMPANY, LTD. (British), from which White Deer Land Co. evolved.

TURKEY TRACK Hutchinson and Hansford Counties. HANSFORD LAND & CATTLE CO. (British). Bought in 1882 from R. S. McAnulty. The brand became the company's principal brand.

Identification of contemporary ranch locations superimposed on map reproduced from an 1885 atlas.
Researched By
Faye Bell Crain, Archivist, Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum.

BAR C's Roberts and Ochiltree Counties. CRESSWELL LAND & CATTLE COMPANY, LTD. (British). Thatcher Bros. & Baxter, principal stockholders. Bought from Henry (Hank) W. Cresswell who retained part-ownership and remained as manager.

QUARTER CIRCLE T Hutchinson County. HANSFORD LAND & CATTLE COMPANY, LTD. (British). Bought in 1882 from Thomas S. Bugbee who had established the ranch in 1876.

LAUREL LEAF Hemphill County. TEXAS LAND & CATTLE COMPANY, LTD. (Scotch).

ROWE Donley and Collingsworth Counties. ROWE BROTHERS, (British). Alfred, Vincent and Bernard Rowe.

LONG S Wheeler County. R. B. MASTERSON.

U BAR U Gray County. NICK EATON.

T BAR T Wheeler and Gray Counties. TOBE ODEN.

QUARTER CIRCLE HEART Donley County. CLARENDON LAND INVESTMENT AGENCY. (British).

SPADE Donley County. J. P. EVANS.

SPADE Hockley, Hale and Lamb Counties. W. L. ELLWOOD.

ROCKING CHAIR Collingsworth County. ROCKING CHAIR RANCHE COMPANY, LTD. (British). Principal stockholders, Sir Dudley Coutts Majoribanks, first Baron of Tweedmouth and John Campbell Hamilton-Gordon, Earl of Aberdeen, whose titles suggested the popular nick-name, "Nobility's Ranche." Bought from John T. Lytle and A. Conkle in 1882.

DIAMOND TAIL Childress and Collingsworth Counties. CURTIS & ATKINSON.

SHOE NAIL Childress County. CHILDRESS LAND & CATTLE CO., K. M. Van Sant, principal stockholder.

SHOE BAR Hall County. BUGBEE-COLEMAN LAND AND CATTLE CO. Thomas S. Bugbee and L. G. Coleman.

MILLIRON Hall, Motley and Cottle Counties. CONTINENTAL LAND & CATTLE CO. Hughes and Simpson, principal stockholders.

OX Childress County. FORSYTHE AND KARNES.

DOLL BABY Donley County. TOM MORRISON.

H BAR Y Greer County. DAY LAND & CATTLE CO., Jno. W. Powers, controlling interest.

PITCHFORK King County. PITCHFORK LAND AND CATTLE CO., St. Louis. D. B. Gardner, part owner and long time manager.

SPUR Dickens, Garza, Crosby and Kent Counties. ESPUELA LAND & CATTLE COMPANY, LTD. (British). Bought in 1885 from Espuela Cattle Company, Fort Worth.

TWO BUCKLE Crosby County. KENTUCKY CATTLE COMPANY.

PO Hemphill and Roberts Counties. ROBERT MOODY.

Compiled by the Editors
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1985

Jim Rob Wills and fellow musician Buck Holligan in the mid-1920s at the John Wills farm. *(Courtesy Edna Wills)*

Jim Rob Wills and a cousin picking cotton down between the rivers in the mid-1920s. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

A drugstore in Turkey, Texas, 1928 or 1929. Jim Bob Wills is in the center to the right of the little boys. *(Courtesy John Luther Garner)*

For a number of reasons, Jim Rob and his wife left New Mexico. Neither barbering nor playing dances was making them a living. When they moved from Roy, Wills owed twelve dollars at a grocery store and was unable to pay it at the time. Just as important, they wanted to be closer to their families. Every chance he had, Jim Rob went home. A sister remembered that one morning about 2:00 A.M., he awoke everyone on the family farm with music with a Spanish sound. "We looked out and Bob had some Mexicans with him, and they were serenading us. They had played a dance not far away."[56] Jim Rob felt that if he moved home he could play the fiddle more and the drums less. Playing part time on drums had taught him a good deal about rhythm, but he was unhappy since it took him away from the fiddle.[57] Moreover, Edna was pregnant, and John and Emma Wills wanted her nearer when the child was born. In the early spring of 1928, Jim Rob and Edna went back to his family's farm. After a few days, Jim Rob took the fourth chair at Ham's Barber Shop in Turkey.[58]

Jim Rob and Edna rented "a little old two-room house, full of flies." Edna finally got enough fly spray to rid the place of the pests. John Wills claimed she used so much of it "you couldn't drive the pore little things back in the house."[59] During the more than a year they lived in Turkey, though Jim Rob both barbered and played for dances, it was difficult for him to make more than a subsistence income. Nevertheless, he and Edna liked being in Turkey. The little town always occupied a special place in Jim Rob's heart, and years later he referred to it as "my hometown." For one thing, their daughter, Robbie Jo, was born while they lived there, on January 15, 1929.

By this time, Jim Bob Wills, as most people referred to him around Turkey,[60] had become one of the best-known fiddlers in West Texas. In the Turkey area he had only one real rival for the distinction of being the best fiddler—his father, John Wills. In fiddlers' contests held anywhere near Turkey or Memphis, the same two fiddlers were often in the finals, John and Jim Bob Wills. If the judge liked the older tunes, John won; if he preferred the newer selections, Jim Bob took the honors.[61] In the bigger contests that included all of West Texas and parts of Oklahoma and New Mexico, John and Jim Bob found winning a great deal more difficult, since they often had to compete against the famous A. C. "Eck" Robertson of Amarillo. A bitter rivalry developed between Robertson and John and Jim Bob Wills. The rivalry was especially sharp between Eck and the elder Wills because they were both excellent breakdown fiddlers.[62] The two of them often fiddled for the championship after eliminating Jim Bob and the other contenders. Bob said, "Eck was very good . . . and was hard to beat. Eck's favorites he played at fiddlers' contests were 'Sally Goodin,' 'Beaumont Rag,' and 'Ragtime Annie.' "[63] Bob added he "never could beat Eck

Robertson in a fiddle contest. Papa beat him lots of times, but I never did."[64]

One of the most interesting encounters between the Wills family and Eck Robertson was at a fiddlers' contest in Munday, Texas. Between fifteen and twenty fiddlers were there, which was about the size of the field for most fiddlers' contests in West Texas. Each fiddler usually played two or three tunes. Then the top two fiddlers competed for the finals.[65] At Munday, Eck Robertson and John Wills were selected for the finals. This was a big contest; both men were far from home; first prize was more than either could have earned in two months' work. Eck went to the platform first and probably played "Beaumont Rag"—neither Bob nor Johnnie Lee Wills could remember for sure; but Bob said "Beaumont Rag" was always Robertson's best. Whatever he played was good, and when he left the platform everyone knew he would be difficult to beat. John Wills, in his turn, probably played "Gone Indian," for that was one of *his* best.[66] When John reached a certain place in the tune, he began hollering and held an elongated cry about an octave above his fiddle music so that his voice harmonized with the fiddle. John kept the music and holler going for what seemed like minutes. His performance was a crowd and judge pleaser, and he won over his arch-rival. As Robertson left the scene of the contest, someone asked, "Eck, did John outfiddle you?" Eck answered, "Hell, no! He didn't outfiddle me. That damned old man Wills outhollered me."[67] John Wills, who in the interim had drunk a good deal of West Texas corn whiskey, learned what Robertson had said. He confronted Eck in a local cafe, challenged him to another contest, and the two played all night.[68]

Unlike his father, Jim Bob could never beat the great Eck Robertson in a fiddlers' contest. But this did not diminish his popularity in the Turkey and Memphis area at all. Contemporary evidence reveals the remarkable—and if it were not for this evidence, incredible—admiration and popularity Jim Bob Wills received from people from all ages and walks of life.[69] He played for most of the teenage dances in the area. One woman, who dated Jim Bob and attended dances with him when he played for the young people of Lakeview, Quitaque, Turkey, and Memphis, reported that he had a teenage following like the Beatles had in a later age. Wills's famous "ah haa," later a professional trademark, was avant-garde in the late teens and early twenties and set off pandemonium when he hollered it at a teenage affair.[70] His appeal to those who today are called senior citizens was no less impressive. Mrs. F. O. Ham remarked that when Jim Bob was working in her husband's barbershop, older people of the community, near death, would request that they be allowed to hear "Jim Bob Wills play one more time." Wills would go at any hour of the day or night, sometimes in rain and bad weather, without complaint or compensation of any kind, to honor these requests.[71]

Jim Bob was no more successful as a barber than he had been as a farmer. He was happier, at least, for he had more time for music. If he was not shaving a customer, he was playing the fiddle, which he always kept in the shop, for the loafers. Old Doc (Joe) Garner, the town's only doctor and a close friend of Jim Bob's, also generally came in every day and requested his favorite tunes, "Big Taters in the Sandy Land" and "Spanish Two-Step."[72] On Saturday nights Wills nearly always played for a dance at some ranch, either with his family or with different musicians. If there was no dance already planned, he promoted one. The first time he tried this, by renting a garage and turning it into a dance hall, he made more money than he ever had in his life, $190 for his share. This taste of "big money" (and it was—musicians were then making no more than that in a week in Chicago) and similar experiences made him want to give all his time to music.[73]

He got his chance in the fall of 1929 when a medicine show came to Turkey. There was a fiddler with the show, and the people of Turkey soon were boasting that the town's favorite fiddler could beat him. A contest was held, as much to help the show's business as anything else, and the show manager himself conceded that Jim Bob had won. The citizens of Turkey were even prouder when the manager offered Wills a job with the show—that is, everybody but F. O. Ham, the owner of the barbershop, and possibly Wills's wife. Wills blacked his face and broke into show business, while Edna waited patiently at home with their daughter, Robbie Jo. After two weeks he was broke and back home, asking for his job at the barbershop. Ham reluctantly took him on again, but an incident occurred a few weeks later which caused him to leave his hometown and West Texas forever.[74]

Jim Bob and a group of fellows from Turkey had gone to Lakeview for a ball game; when they returned they were quite drunk, but not quiet.[75] The town's favorite fiddler ended up spending the night and most of the next day in jail. Regardless of his faults, whether drunkenness or rowdiness, the people of Turkey were always willing to forgive him. They always admired him, were proud of his ability as a musician, and appreciated his kindness to older folks and others who asked for his help. They were ready to forgive again. But Jim Bob was humiliated and ashamed; he had never been in jail before. He knew that in a small town everyone knew it. To save face he pretended to blame the whole town because he was the only one of that noisy crowd who had gone to jail. He packed his few belongings into a bag, walked down the main street of Turkey with his head in the air, and would not even accept a ride from his friends. So angry was he, and in such a huff, that he left without his fiddle. He had no plans except to go to the Fort Worth–Dallas area.[76]

Years later Wills repented of his pettiness and admitted he had misjudged the people of Turkey. After he was famous, he brought his whole

band to the little town and played a free concert in the street in front of Ham's Barber Shop. Any time he was in the area, he drove back to see friends in his hometown. Later Turkey showed its appreciation for his achievements by asking him to play a concert in the school auditorium for the whole community. They also erected a historical marker near the Wills farm to commemorate the birthplace of western swing and a very elaborate and expensive stele in Turkey as a tribute to the town's most famous son.[77]

When Jim Bob left that day in the fall of 1929, he soon crossed Little Red River and went by the family farm. After telling his family good-bye, he crossed Big Red River and left the place of his boyhood. Though he never returned to live there again, that place and the things he learned there were the most important influences in his life and music. At the crest of a hill, he turned and took a final look down between the rivers.

1. Johnnie Lee Wills; Ruby Wills Sullivan; Billy Jack Wills; John Luther Garner; Ruth Sheldon, *Hubbin' It: The Life of Bob Wills* (Tulsa: Privately published, 1938), p. 20.
2. John and Emmaline Wills later lived longer in Tulsa than they did on this farm, but their children were no longer at home.
3. Johnnie Lee Wills; Bob Wills.
4. I visited the farm many times between 1969 and 1975. There are plans to move the old Wills home from the farm into the little town of Turkey and make it into a museum.
5. Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House; Johnnie Lee Wills.
6. Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House; Ed House; Ruth House.
7. Laverne Simmons Barnhill.
8. Johnnie Lee Wills. Also Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House; Laverne Simmons Barnhill; Ed House; Ruth House; Watt Rice.
9. Laverne Simmons Barnhill.
10. Bobby Taylor; Lerlene Stout; Lorene Wills Burton; Ruby Wills Sullivan; Edna Wills.
11. Johnnie Lee Wills.
12. Bob Wills.
13. Ruby Wills Sullivan; Johnnie Lee Wills; Eloise Wills House.
14. Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* pp. 20–21.
15. Gloria Denko, "Descant: 'Aaaaaaaaa Haaaaaa' to Echo On," *Amarillo Sunday News-Globe,* Dec. 19, 1971. Denko, who interviewed Wills in Amarillo in 1967, had been interested in his career for several years. She generously made her entire file available to me. See also her articles entitled " 'San Antonio Rose' Carries Memories of a Long Career," *Amarillo Globe-Times,* Sept. 27, 1967, and "Member of Medicare Generation: Flower Has Wilted for Texas Playboy," *Amarillo Sunday News-Globe,* May 24, 1970.
16. Bob Wills.
17. Ruby Wills Sullivan; Lorene Wills Burton; Eloise Wills House; Bobby Taylor; Lerlene Stout.
18. Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* p. 22.
19. Ibid., p. 26. See also Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook.
20. Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* p. 30; Mrs. Roscoe Partridge; Harold Partridge; J. B. Walling; W. R. Walling.
21. Bob Wills; Mrs. Roscoe Partridge; Harold Partridge.
22. Bob Wills. Also Eldon Shamblin; Ruby Wills Sullivan; Mary Lou Cloud; Edna Wills; Robbie Wills Calhoun; Al Stricklin.
23. Bob Wills; Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* pp. 32–33.
24. Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* p. 36.

25. Eldon Shamblin; Ruby Wills Sullivan; Al Stricklin; Ada Perry; Smokey Dacus; Sam Gibbs.

26. Lawrence Hedrick, R. K. Deckard, and Samuel Stennis were helpful regarding Wills's life at the time he was helping construct this plant for the U.S. Zinc Company.

27. Listen to Bob Wills, especially his interview with Hank Penny.

28. Denko, " 'San Antonio Rose.' "

29. Lawrence Hedrick.

30. Laverne Simmons Barnhill; Bob Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; Rip Ramsey; Watt Rice; Billy Jack Wills; Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House. It was Edna Wills (Edna Posey and Bob were married in 1926) who said he made only three or four dollars at dances between 1926 and 1929.

31. Bob Wills; Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* pp. 44–47.

32. Bob Wills; Ruby Wills Sullivan; Johnnie Lee Wills.

33. Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* pp. 51–55.

34. Bob Wills.

35. Ibid.; Johnnie Lee Wills.

36. Cora Hancock; Tommy Lewis Hancock; Billy Joe Hancock. There was great interest in the development of race horses at this time in West Texas. Listen also to my interview with George Humphrey, foreman of the 6666 Ranch.

37. Ruby Wills Sullivan; Lorene Wills Burton; John Luther Garner; Harold Ham; Sam Gibbs; Herman Arnspiger; Joe Andrews; Leon McAuliffe; June Whalin; Kermit Whalin; Bob Wills.

38. Leon McAuliffe; Edna Wills; Robbie Wills Calhoun; Johnnie Lee Wills.

39. Al Stricklin; Joe Ferguson; Sleepy Johnson; Leon McAuliffe.

40. Laura Lee Owens; Eldon Shamblin; Sam Gibbs; Leon McAuliffe; Johnnie Lee Wills.

41. Lorene Wills Burton; Ruby Wills Sullivan.

42. Mary Lou Cloud; Ruth Downing; Edna Wills; Robbie Wills Calhoun; Mary Helen Brown; Ruby Wills Sullivan.

43. Lorene Wills Burton; Bobby Taylor; Lerlene Stout.

44. I am indebted to Edna Wills for her taped interview with me, as well as for photographs, her scrapbook, and miscellaneous materials. When she learned I was writing this biography she wrote down her reflections on her life with Bob Wills, entitling them "What I Know About 'Bob Wills' " (Nov., 1972). She gave me this manuscript when I interviewed her on December 1, 1973. Hereafter I will cite Edna's interview as Edna Wills and her manuscript as Edna Wills, "What I Know."

45. A tenth child was born to John and Emmaline Wills in 1929, a girl named Jesse, who died in early childhood.

46. Edna Wills; Edna Wills, "What I Know."

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

50. Bob Wills; O'Neal Watson. Watson, who presently owns a barber college in Amarillo, was helpful regarding Dendy's Barber College. See also Mrs. F. O. Ham; Harold Ham; John Luther Garner; Edna Wills; Edna Wills, "What I Know."

51. Bob Wills. Edna Wills told me they went to Roy because they heard there was an opening for a barber; the people there "loved him, but not as a barber." See also Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* pp. 69–70; Jennie McKenzie.

52. For recent accounts of "chicken scratch" music in Arizona, see Naomi Ware, "Survival and Change in Pima Indian Music," *Ethnomusicology,* 14, no. 1 (Jan., 1970), 105, and *Chicken Scratch: Popular Dance Music of the Indians of Southern Arizona,* Canyon Records C–6085.

53. Bob Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills. See especially Edna Wills, "What I Know." In her interview, Edna said that "no matter what he played they danced the same way."

54. John "Knocky" Parker thinks that the use of fiddles by descendants of the Spanish in Texas and New Mexico has been very important in the rural music that influenced Wills.

Parker is a jazz artist who was a member of the Light Crust Doughboys for many years. Listen also to Marvin Montgomery.

55. There were sounds in this 1940 recording that twenty-five years later were called "Tijuana brass."

56. Eloise Wills House; Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* p. 72.

57. Bob Wills.

58. Mrs. F. O. Ham; Harold Ham; Jewel Hardaway; John Luther Garner; Jim Majors; Edna Wills; Edna Wills, "What I Know."

59. Edna Wills; Edna Wills, "What I Know."

60. Edna Wills told me that the people of Lakeview and Memphis called her husband Jim Rob, while in Turkey he was referred to as Jim Bob. It was not until they moved to Fort Worth that he became known as Bob Wills. Edna said she could often tell where people were from by the name they used to refer to her husband.

61. Othel Stubb; Dewitt Huffines; Harold Ham; Mrs. F. O. Ham; Watt Rice; Jewel Hardaway; Rip Ramsey; Dan Gibson; John Luther Garner; Laverne Simmons Barnhill; Lawrence Hedrick. These fiddlers' contests in Turkey, according to contemporaries, were held in the movie house. Dewitt Huffines, Harold Ham, and others said John and Jim Bob Wills were often in the finals. Judges often asked each of them to play several selections before they made a decision. Ordinarily the contests were free to the public, but an admission was charged when they were held in the theater.

62. A breakdown fiddler plays music that is oriented to square dancing or some other fast dance, usually folk dance. Robertson himself said he played "mostly square dances." See Earl V. Spielman, "An Interview with Eck Robertson," *JEMF Quarterly,* 7 (Winter, 1972), 186.

63. Robertson's many recordings are now rare. The best example of the kind of music he played in the fiddlers' contests in West Texas is his "Ragtime Annie," Victor B–26667–2, recorded in 1922, about the time he was competing against John and Bob Wills. This recording has been reissued in RCA Victor's Vintage series, on *Early Rural String Bands,* RCA Victor LPV–552. Spielman writes that the first commercial recording of rural and fiddle music was Robertson's June, 1922, "Sally Gooden" ("Interview," p. 179). See also Bill C. Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.: A Fifty-Year History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), pp. 39, 40, 146.

64. Bob Wills.

65. Ibid. Cf. my tapes of the old-time fiddlers' contest at Lovington, N. Mex. (on deposit in the Southwest Collection, TTU). I am indebted to Hoyle Nix, who recorded fiddle tunes for me in order to help preserve this musical heritage. I have also benefited from hearing music recorded at various fiddlers' contests by Sleepy Johnson and others (tapes in my possession).

66. Bob Wills. I have found only one recording of John Wills playing the fiddle, a radio transcription made at KBYE, Oklahoma City, in either 1949 or 1950. John Wills died in 1952. The original is in the Glenn P. White Collection, and a copy is in my possession.

67. Johnnie Lee Wills; Bob Wills.

68. Ibid.

69. Harold Ham; Mrs. F. O. Ham; Watt Rice; Mrs. Watt Rice; Laverne Simmons Barnhill; Jewel Hardaway; Lawrence Hedrick; Dan Gibson; Ed House; Ruth House; Othel Stubb; Dewitt Huffines; John Luther Garner; Jim Majors. Majors, the postmaster at Turkey, was very helpful in arranging interviews in the Turkey area.

70. Laverne Simmons Barnhill; John Luther Garner. Listen also to Bob Wills (Hank Penny interview).

71. Mrs. F. O. Ham.

72. Listen especially to the interview with Dr. Joe Garner's son, John Luther Garner, and his daughter, Jewel Hardaway. Also Bob Wills; *Bob Wills Keepsake Album No. 1,* Longhorn LP–001.

73. Additional information concerning Wills's life in the Turkey area appears in the interviews with Harold Ham; Watt Rice; Mrs. Watt Rice; Lawrence Hedrick; Dan Gibson;

Johnnie Lee Wills; Rip Ramsey; Eloise Wills House; Ruby Wills Sullivan; Lorene Wills Burton; Marvin Montgomery; Bryant Eddleman; Ruby Cushenberry; Mrs. Wayne Hackerson; Dewitt Huffines; Othel Stubb; Billy Jack Wills; John Luther Garner.

74. Harold Ham; Mrs. F. O. Ham; John Luther Garner; Bob Wills; Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* pp. 75–76.

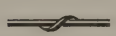
75. Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* pp. 79–80.

76. Bob Wills.

77. Lawrence Hedrick; Laverne Simmons Barnhill; Harold Ham; Mrs. F. O. Ham; Lawton Williams, "Home near Turkey, Tex.—Marker Will Honor Bob Wills," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram,* Apr. 15, 1972; Luron Brown, "Thousands Join Turkey Folks for Bob Wills Homecoming," *Amarillo Sunday News-Globe,* Apr. 30, 1972; "Townsend to Speak at Bob Wills Event," *Amarillo Globe-Times,* Mar. 31, 1975; Jim Edd Wines to me, Feb. 12, 1975. See also Official Memorandum by Preston Smith, Governor of Texas, Apr. 19, 1972.

3

"I Slurred My Fiddle . . . to Play the Blues"



I rode horseback from the place between the rivers to Childress to see Bessie Smith.

Bob Wills

Jim Rob's first public performance as a fiddler points up three things that influenced his whole life and especially the development of his musical career. First, Jim Rob played that night in 1915, as he had many times with his father, in the ranch country of West Texas. His formative years were spent in the heart of one of the best ranching areas in the world. Near his boyhood home was the famous JA Ranch, whose miles of grassland and herds of cattle spread all the way to Palo Duro Canyon. The 6666 Ranch, Matador Ranch, Pitchfork Ranch, Barton Ranch, and SMS ranches were close enough that his family played for the cowboys from all those spreads.[1] Through all his subsequent career, Jim Rob's music was for the most part western, that is, aimed at cowboys, cattlemen, and people influenced by that way of life, and it has remained a favorite with them. While still in his teens, Jim Rob was selected out of all the fiddlers in West Texas to play for a dance at a birthday party for the famous pioneer rancher Colonel Charles Goodnight.[2]

Not only was he always popular with ranch people, West Texas ranch life also left an enduring mark on his life and music. Though the cowboy or western image became more obvious after he began making motion pictures, it was no less real during his youth in West Texas. Living in the ranch country deepened his love for and understanding of cowboy and ranch life. Most of it he learned from firsthand experience, working on ranches and handling cattle on horseback.[3] Years after he played his first dance, when he played songs that portrayed cowboy life, he had a feeling for what the lyrics depicted. "Dusty Skies" is a good illustration:

Dusty skies, I can't see nothin' in sight.
Good ole Dan, you'll have to guide me right.
If we lose our way, the cattle will stray,
And we'll lose them all tonight.

And all of the grass and water's gone.
We'll have to keep the cattle movin' on.

Sand blowin', I just can't breathe in this air.
Thought it would soon be clear and fair.
But dust storms played hell with land and folks as well.
Got to be movin' somewhere.

Hate to leave the old ranch so bare,
But I got to be movin' somewhere.

So git along, dogies, we're movin off of this range.
Never thought as how I'd make a change.
But the blue skies have failed, so we're on our last trail
Underneath these dusty skies.

These ain't tears in my eyes,
Just sand from these dusty skies.[4]

Wills often wrote and played music with the people in mind who lived in this kind of social milieu. Though there is a good deal of realism in the lyrics of songs like "Dusty Skies," Wills often also included references to cowboy and ranch life that reflected much of the romance associated with it.[5] This is one reason his music often lacked the realism of other forms of rural music, and rock.

In a more practical way, the environment of the ranch country left its mark on young Wills. West Texas lent itself to the exploitation of vast areas of grasslands and the development of one of the world's largest ranching societies.[6] When Jim Rob was growing up, society was even more dispersed than it is today. Because cattle ranches in that area required a minimum of several hundred acres, in many cases several thousand acres, it was often miles between ranch houses.[7] Some of the ranches were so large they built line shacks and cow camps many miles from the headquarters or main ranch house. Cowboys lived in the line shacks while they rode fence to check it for breaks, or during spring and fall roundups. Married cowboys usually lived at the cow camps and oversaw a section of the ranch. The Matador Ranch, where Jim Rob often played, had one pasture with more than a hundred thousand acres in it.[8] Towns of any size were, in Jim Rob's language, "few and far between." The only sizable town in the area was Amarillo, and it was more than one hundred miles away. A lack of good transportation and adequate roads also prevented people from socializing very much.

When they did get together, their principal social function was dancing. This was not so much a result of a dispersed population, poor communications, and the lack of towns large enough to provide other forms of entertainment, as it was a reflection of the strength of frontier tradition, where folk dancing had always been important. In many ways the society of Jim Rob's childhood still bore the marks of the frontier, and the pattern

he developed of playing music for dancing was to become the most important single factor in his career.[9] (This second point will be given further attention in chapter 5.)

According to Leon McAuliffe, one of the musicians who later helped Jim Rob pioneer western swing, this emphasis on music for dancing was the principal reason Wills's music was so different from music in the East that also had rural and folk roots: "The basic difference in country and western music, if there is any way of defining it, is that west of the Mississippi River when we played, we played for dancing. East of the Mississippi they played a show, or they played in a schoolhouse, just for people to sit and listen, visual or audible entertainment and not for dancing."[10]

The third important thing about James Robert Wills's 1915 performance was the fact that he played the violin or fiddle. This instrument always dominated his music and opened the doors of his career. This aspect of his music was also developed during his youth in West Texas. In many ways, those years were the most decisive in the development of his musical career. His father and grandfather, both excellent fiddlers, gave a great deal of attention to Wills's musical training. Both were strict disciplinarians and demanded that he meet their standards of excellence. Much more was involved than the love of music and family pride. Competition was keen among fiddlers in West Texas, and the Wills family felt they must be the best, since a significant part of the family income was derived from playing for dances. There were actually times when they could not have eaten without it.[11]

Since most of their music was for dancing, they tried to avoid the choppiness and jerkiness that is often found in fiddle music. They developed a style that emphasized long, smooth bow strokes. Johnnie Lee recalled that Jim Rob had to learn this the hard way. When he was quite young, Jim Rob was playing his fiddle one day for the family, and his grandfather was among the listeners. "Jim Rob," Uncle Tom Wills said, "quit sawing on that fiddle. Put it down and don't play it any more until you learn to play all of that bow. If it had been intended that you play only twelve inches of the bow, they would have made it only one foot long."[12] John Wills put it another way: "Jim Rob, don't jiggle the bow."[13] When asked where he and his brother got their style, Johnnie Lee answered, "It was born in us. Bob got his fiddle style and two-four dance beat from our father and grandfather. Bob had it in the beginning before he left the farm." In the early 1970s Bob Wills himself reflected, "I got my musical style down between the rivers."[14]

By the expression "down between the rivers," Wills meant more than the important influence of his father and grandfather. The style young

Wills developed, while similar to theirs, was nevertheless different. Tom and John Wills were, by and large, breakdown fiddlers. Though they smoothed their music and could slow it down for round (two-step) dancing, they were still more comfortable playing for folk square dancing. Jim Rob developed an even smoother style that fit his own musical taste and personality. He wanted to play music that would appeal to a broader audience, that would include both frontier fiddle music and more modern dance music.

According to Wills, the musicians who influenced him in that direction were the Stocklett brothers, Check and Albert, who worked on a farm near Quitaque for about a year. Check Stocklett had studied violin several years and had played in symphony orchestras as well as in fiddle bands. Albert Stocklett played guitar. While the Wills family lived on the river farm, Jim Rob went to hear the Stocklett's as often as he could. He liked their rhythm and the more modern dance music they played. Check took an interest in Jim Rob and always handed him his violin and asked the young fiddler to play a few selections at their dances. Before the Stocklett's moved back to New Mexico, they had left their mark on Wills's music. He said that in many ways they had the best fiddle band for dancing he ever heard.[15]

Wills's father, grandfather, and the Stocklett brothers account for major influences on his musical style in his formative years. But they do not account entirely for the peculiar sound he got out of a violin. People who heard both Jim Rob and his father in the years around 1920 remark that young Wills produced a sound like none other they ever heard. They could not tell you why, but they liked it.[16] In recent years, some fiddlers have copied Wills to the extent that his fiddle sound is no longer as distinctive as it once was. But for more than thirty years it was unique, and it helps explain why people came to his dances by the thousands and bought millions of his recordings.

In those years down between the rivers Jim Rob continued to love and learn the blues the blacks played and sang in his father's cotton fields and around the cotton shacks. He admired the Negro blues not only as a musical expression; the blues also seemed to express his own personality or soul.[17] He played as he felt. Much of his life was hard, sad, and tragic; much was happy and carefree. Jim Rob tried to play the blues on his fiddle as the Negroes sang it in his childhood and as he himself later sang blues. It was the mournful, almost tortured sound of the blues together with the happy sound of the blues in his fiddle that made his music so different and so appealing. One musician, who played second fiddle to him for several years, said, "Bob often hit notes that were mournful. They almost sounded as if they were off-key. Yet I felt he added this intentionally to get a blues

sound."[18] With a twinkle in his eyes, Wills himself said, "I slurred my fiddle in order to play the blues."[19] And, referring to his vocal efforts with his band: "I have always been a blues singer."[20]

During the years Wills lived in West Texas (and probably throughout his entire life), the great blues artist Bessie Smith was his favorite singer: "I rode horseback from the place between the rivers to Childress to see Bessie Smith. . . . She was about the greatest thing I had ever heard. In fact, there was no doubt about it. She *was* the greatest thing I ever heard."[21] Wills loved Bessie Smith and the blues, and he thought his best performances as a vocalist were in recordings where he sang blues selections. Some jazz historians tell us that jazz was the result of musicians trying to capture the sound of their voices, their blues, on musical instruments. Wills accomplished this in his violin style and thus moved farther from the traditional fiddle music of the frontier to jazz.

The blues idioms in his fiddle style helped give Wills's music the "heat of jazz" that was a necessity in popular dance music in his generation.[22] And in spite of his long, smooth bow strokes, which were conducive to a mournful blues quality, his use of syncopated rhythms gave his music the "bumpiness" or "swing" of jazz that characterized the popular dance music of his age. The jazz in Wills's fiddle was not characterized by the hot breaks or hot choruses that Joe Venuti and Jesse Ashlock so brilliantly improvised. Wills nearly always played melody, giving it his own blues and jazz interpretation. This accounts, in part, for his popularity as a fiddler,[23] since the average listener appreciated the melody more than the improvisation of the jazz choruses Wills always demanded from his musicians. Wills got a blues quality much like the blacks who played the fiddle in the nineteenth century or in jazz and swing bands between 1900 and the early 1930s.[24] There are many examples of the use of the fiddle by blacks in the Archive of New Orleans Jazz at Tulane University.[25] A more accessible example is the performance of violinist Robert Robbins, who accompanied Bessie Smith in her 1923 recording of "Ticket Agent Ease Your Window Down."[26]

Fortunately for Wills, about the time most jazz bands and dance orchestras were abandoning the violin, he began to revive it in dance music. He did much more, however. He made it a front-line instrument, often featuring from two to six violins in his "fiddle ensemble."[27] The fiddle had been an American favorite, whether in classical or in folk music. Inadvertently, Wills chose a popular instrument to emphasize in popular music.[28] Because of the happy circumstance that he played the violin and originally had a "fiddle band,"[29] he came to make it the dominant instrument in a popular dance band for the first time in the history of American music.

Wills made the fiddle and western music both popular and respectable, and he did it against great odds.[30] At the time Jim Rob Wills played his first dance in West Texas, the fiddle was considered by many a vulgar medium of musical expression. It suggested provincial folk music, backward whites, or "nigger fiddling" (as racists called it).[31] Young Wills never dreamed that night in 1915 that by 1940 he would help make fiddle music so appealing that much of the popular music Americans listened to would be influenced by it.[32] Neither could he visualize that the ever-popular Bing Crosby would record one of his compositions (originally a fiddle tune) and sell more than one and a half million copies of it;[33] that Carnegie Hall itself would open its doors to musicians who would be influenced by the music he played that night; and that western swing would be featured at the University of Chicago Folk Festival nearly six decades later. Nor did Wills realize his fiddle would make him so popular that he would play it in nearly twenty movies between 1940 and 1950.[34] By that time, he would be acclaimed by many musicians as one of the most distinguished fiddlers in the history of American music.[35] But that was all in the faraway future.

1. Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House; Johnnie Lee Wills; Bob Wills; field notes with cowboys on these and other ranches in West Texas. See also Eleanor Mitchell Traweek, *Of Such Things: A History of Motley County* (Quanah, Tex.: Nortex Press, 1973), p. 188.

2. Ruth Sheldon, *Hubbin' It: The Life of Bob Wills* (Tulsa: Privately published, 1938), p. 55.

3. Rip Ramsey; Bob Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; Edna Wills.

4. Texan Cindy Walker wrote this song especially for a Bob Wills movie in 1941, and Wills recorded it in Hollywood that same year. © copyright American Music, Inc., 1942, assigned to Mesa Music Company 1951; renewal 1970 Mesa Music Company. International copyright secured. Used by permission. The lyrics quoted here are transcribed from Wills's 1941 recording; the text also appears in Dorothy Horstman, *Sing Your Heart Out, Country Boy* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1975), pp. 297–298.

5. Leon McAuliffe; Bob Wills.

6. Refer to my interview with George Humphrey, who for nearly forty years was foreman of the 6666 Ranch at Guthrie. The 6666 Ranch occupies nearly a half million acres and is only one of several ranches owned by the Burnet Estate. Their Triangle Ranch is in the same area, less than forty miles from Guthrie, near Paducah. Also my interview with Porter Myers, who worked on the 6666 Ranch for nearly forty years, during which time he lived in line shacks and cow camps and went out with the wagon during roundups twice a year. No successful study has been made of Burk Burnet, his ranches, his oil, and his other interests. A study of this colorful founder of the 6666 Ranch will be welcome.

7. Listen, e.g., to W. G. "Bill" Swenson; A. M. G. "Swede" Swenson; John Selman of the SMS ranches at Stamford, Texas. For years Bill and Swede were managers of the SMS ranches, which include the Flat Top, Tongue River, Throckmorton, and Spur ranches. John Selman, known as "Scandalous John," was the colorful and amiable foreman of the SMS Flat Top Ranch for more than fifty years. No comprehensive study of the Swenson Land and Cattle Company has been made. The well-preserved archives of the company, in the Southwest Collection at Texas Tech University, date back to the early part of the nineteenth century and include papers from the Swenson mercantile interests in New Orleans as well as papers on interests in Austin and West Texas. Some of the land patents are signed by Sam Houston himself. For a good study of the Spur Ranch, see W. C. Holden, *The Spur Ranch* (Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1934).

8. Ron Canaster; Jo Canaster. Jo Canaster grew up on the section of the Matador Ranch with the 100,000-acre pasture. Her father ran that part of the Matador. Ron Canaster worked on the Matador, lived in line shacks, and worked on the wagon at all the roundups. He later moved to the cow camp where Jo grew up, and they eventually married. They lived on other parts of the Matador and later worked for the 6666 Ranch for many years. Listen also to Ike Rude, who worked on both the Matador Ranch and the JA Ranch just after the turn of the century. The standard study on the Matador Ranch is Willam M. Pearce, *The Matador Land and Cattle Company* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964). See also Traweek, *Of Such Things,* pp. 27–41.

9. Bob Wills.

10. Leon McAuliffe. McAuliffe, who was with Wills from March, 1935, to December, 1942, is one of the most distinguished artists in the history of western swing.

11. Lorene Wills Burton; Bobby Taylor; Lerlene Stout; Eloise Wills House; Ruby Wills Sullivan; Laverne Simmons Barnhill; Bob Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills.

12. Johnnie Lee Wills; Ruby Wills Sullivan; Bob Wills.

13. Eloise Wills House; Ruby Wills Sullivan.

14. Bob Wills; Glenn P. White; Johnnie Lee Wills.

15. Beyond my interview with Bob Wills, the most helpful discussion concerning the Stockletts was with Laverne Simmons Barnhill, who attended many of their dances and had several dates with Check during his stay in Quitaque.

16. Watt Rice; Mrs. Watt Rice; Lawrence Hedrick; Othel Stubb; John Luther Garner; Dewitt Huffines; Dot Townsend; field notes based on conversations with musicians as well as fans in various parts of the nation during more than twenty-five years.

17. Leon McAuliffe; Smokey Dacus; Woodie Wood; Joe Andrews. See especially Tony Russell, *Blacks, Whites and Blues* (New York: Stein and Day, 1970), pp. 85–88.

18. Keith Coleman; Woodie Wood. Wood said Bob "did not hit the notes right on the nose" when he played the blues, "he sort of oozed into it."

19. Bob Wills.

20. Ibid. Also Betty Wills.

21. Bob Wills.

22. According to Gilbert Chase, "The blues were a means of effecting the transition of Afro-American 'hot' music from the vocal to the instrumental realm" (*America's Music: From the Pilgrims to the Present,* 2nd ed. [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966], p. 449).

23. Jazz expert William Russell told me at Preservation Hall in New Orleans in 1973 that one reason Bob Wills remained popular at a time when other dance orchestras were unemployed was that he always played "some melody."

24. Listen especially to Louis James.

25. I am indebted to Richard B. Allen of the Archive of New Orleans Jazz, Tulane University, for the opportunity of hearing the James interview and many examples of early black fiddlers, some of whom were well known in jazz in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Some of the best examples of black fiddle style for that era are the recordings by Louis James. James admittedly patterned his style after Joe Gabriel, whose style originated around the last third of the nineteenth century. Gabriel had a band in Thibodaux in 1890 and played in the New Orleans and South Louisiana area. None of his recordings have survived—if any were ever made. James was born in Thibodaux in 1890 and performed in jazz bands most of his life, playing violin, saxophone, and clarinet in the James Brothers Orchestra in 1917, Louis Dumaine's band in 1927, and the Percy Humphrey and Kid Thomas bands in 1961–62. James may be heard on *String Bands,* Music of New Orleans MNLP 11, especially "Memphis Blues." Henry Simms illustrates the "Mississippi style" on *Charlie Patton 1929–30,* Origin Jazz Library OJL 1. Listen also to the recordings made in 1927 in Atlanta by Peg Leg Howell and his Gang (Eddie Anthony, violin), reissued on *The Great Country Blues Singers,* SBS Ep 3; Dixieland Jug Blowers, "Garden of Joy Blues" (Clifford Hayes, violin, 1927), and Jack Kelly and his South Memphis Jug Band, "Red Ripe Tomatoes" (Will Bast, violin, 1933), *The Great Jug Bands,* Origin Jazz Library OJL 4; Dixieland Jug Blowers (Clifford Hayes, violin, 1926–27), *Jugs, Washboards,*

and Kazoos, RCA Victor LPV 540; *Peter Bocage,* Music of New Orleans MNLP 3; Banjo Ikey Robinson and his Bull Fiddle Band (R. Waugh, violin, 1929), "My Four Reasons," Brunswick BR 70680, and "Rock Me Mama," Brunswick BR 4964; Mobile Strugglers, "Memphis Blues" (1949), American Music AM–104. See also George M. Foster, *Pops Foster: The Autobiography of a New Orleans Jazzman* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), p. 75.

26. This recording has been reissued on *The Bessie Smith Story, Vol. 1,* Columbia CL 855, and *Empty Bed Blues,* Columbia C 30450. Listen also to Edgar Sampson's violin chorus with the Fletcher Henderson orchestra in "The House of David Blues" (1931), *Fletcher Henderson "Swing's the Thing," Vol. 2 (1931–1934),* Decca DL 79228.

27. Examples of the violin as a lead instrument in a New Orleans band are Armand J. Piron, leader of Piron's New Orleans Orchestra, in "Bouncing Around," Okeh 40021, and "West Indies Blues," Columbia 14007–D (1923). Also Joe Venuti on *Venuti-Lang 1927–1928,* Tom 8, and *Venuti-Lang 1929–1930,* Tom 7. Richard B. Allen has found the violin as a lead instrument in jazz and orchestrations most common until about 1910. Then "the violin died out as a lead instrument in jazz, with the exception of a handful of men like Piron and John Robichaux" (Allen to me, Oct. 8, 1974).

28. Jazz and swing bands did not give up the fiddle entirely. Joe Venuti, Leroy "Stuff" Smith, Ray Nance, and a few others used the instrument in the Swing Era. Examples are Smith's chorus in "St. James Infirmary" (1930) on Alphonse Trent and his Orchestra, *Territory Bands 1929–1933,* Historical HLP 5829–24; Stuff Smith and his Onyx Club Boys, "Ole Joe's Hittin' the Jug," Vocalion 3270 (1936), and "You're a Viper," Vocalion 3201 (1936); Joe Marsala and his Chicagoans (Ray Biondi, violin), "Hot String Beans," Vocalion 4168 (1938); Duke Ellington (Ray Nance, violin), "Caravan" (1937), *Duke Ellington's Greatest,* Victor LPT 1004.

29. My discussion with Leon McAuliffe concerning the fiddle band and Wills's evolution from it to a dance orchestra was quite helpful.

30. Bill C. Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.: A Fifty-Year History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), pp. 192–193, 196–197, 208.

31. Irving L. Sablosky, *American Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 57.

32. See "His Grosses Are as Big as Texas: Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys," *Billboard 1944 Music Year Book,* pp. 346–347; "The Bob Wills' Fiddle Tickles the B. O.," *Billboard,* Jan. 20, 1944, cover photo and p. 4.

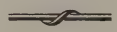
33. Bing Crosby's recording of Wills's "New San Antonio Rose" was not released until January 28, 1941, but sold 84,500 copies before February 1 ("Songs from Texas," *Time,* Mar. 24, 1941, p. 36). Malone wrote: "The Bob Wills style, if not the Bob Wills name, was now being given national distribution" (*Country Music,* pp. 180–181). See also Rupert Richardson, *Texas: The Lone Star State* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1943), p. 549.

34. Bob Healy, Bob Pinson, and Glenn P. White, "Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys: A Bio-Discography," *Record Research,* No. 79 (Oct., 1966), p. 4.

35. Some authorities would question the claim made in the title of Merle Haggard's 1970 album *A Tribute to the Best Damn Fiddle Player in the World (or, My Salute to Bob Wills),* Capitol ST 638. The fact that one would dare assign such a title indicates, however, how Wills is esteemed as an artist. See also Malone, *Country Music,* pp. 178–181.

4

Frontier Folk Music Moves to Town



His trick was to bring ranch-house music nearer to the city.
Time, February 11, 1946

Jim Rob Wills's abrupt departure from West Texas came a few months before the crash on Wall Street in 1929. He probably arrived in Fort Worth in the late spring or early summer of that epochal year. Nineteen twenty-nine marked a turning point in both American history and Jim Rob's career. It was not exactly the best time to begin a musical career, but neither Wills nor anyone else knew it then. Actually, he had planned to continue barbering, but since Fort Worth did not need any barbers, in a few days he was walking the streets, broke, disgusted, and hungry. More than once he wished he was back cutting hair at Ham's Barber Shop in Turkey.[1] If his beginning in Fort Worth was any indication of the future, the future appeared gloomy. He did not even have a fiddle.

Learning of a medicine show that was soon going on the road, he decided that his two weeks' experience qualified him not only to appear with it as a performer, but to help construct it as well. He got a job building the stage and a promise of a job when the show went on the road. He earned enough money for food, lodging, and a down payment on a $6.50 violin.[2] Armed with this instrument, he and two musicians he had picked up somewhere in Fort Worth, perhaps at the medicine show, marched into one of the largest radio stations in the Southwest, WBAP in Fort Worth, and asked for an audition. Wills had his faults, but timidity was not one of them. And he was persuasive. They got the audition and were promised radio time. Jim Rob must have wondered before their first WBAP broadcast if his music, which was so popular in Turkey and West Texas, would go over in the city. Any doubts he may have had were soon gone. The unknown trio was given a radio show, and approving mail poured in. But because they had no sponsor, no money poured in.

Wills had to give up the broadcast and find a job at which he could make a living. By that time his wife and young daughter had joined him.[3]

He took a job as a musician and blackface comic on the medicine show he had helped build when he first arrived in Fort Worth. Since there was already a Jim on the show, the manager began calling Jim Rob "Bob." According to Edna Wills, that was the beginning of the name Bob Wills.[4] The show itself was called Doc's Medicine Show. Not very original—all these shows were "doc's" or had a "doctor" to add a facade to the "medicine" they sold, which they tried to pass off as an early-day wonder drug, claiming their miracle medicine cured everything from bunions and fallen arches to hemorrhoids and constipation to headaches and hay fever. It was not entirely worthless. Since the medicine contained a great deal of alcohol, one could take "two or three drinks and naturally feel better."[5]

When Herman Arnspiger and a friend were driving through the Riverside Addition of Fort Worth in late spring or early summer of 1929, they noticed a crowd watching a minstrel scene at this medicine show. This was the first time Arnspiger ever saw Bob Wills: "He was playing his violin and singing." There were two guitar players and a banjo player with him.[6] "And it was pretty good," Arnspiger remembered. "Bob was in blackface and was the comic; he cracked jokes, sang, and did an amazing jig dance."[7] Doc then came out on stage and made an appeal to sell the wonder medicine. Wills and the other musicians were busy hollering in the crowd. They shouted "Anyone else?" and "Get it before we've sold out," regardless of whether people were buying or not. And whether the amount they sold was great or small, they ended by saying, "Sold out, Doc. Come back tomorrow night." After a few more songs and dances, Doc appeared again, to give the "candy pitch." "Folks," he began in a friendly, disarming voice, "Mrs. Murry of Chicago, Illinois, has made a brand new candy called Mrs. Murry's Milk and Honey Dainties. Since we are introducing it, there is a prize in every package, ranging from wristwatches to diamond rings." Wills and the other hustlers went back into the audience, crying their usual jargon, "Candy, ten cents a box, a prize in each and every box. Hurry ! Get 'em while they last! Three to a customer, please. Limited supply for this performance."[8]

Arnspiger invited Wills and the other musicians to his apartment for a jam session after the show. Arnspiger was a guitarist, and Bob asked him to join the show, as they were losing one of their regular guitar players. Arnspiger jumped at the opportunity. He had been working in a Fort Worth textile mill from 1924 until the "crash of 1929." "The plant closed in a few days," he said, "and there was no such thing as a job." Arnspiger and Wills became a team on the show, Herman as the straight man, and Bob as the comic. For a few weeks they played all over Fort Worth, moving their stage and equipment almost daily. Late in the summer of 1929 they went on the road, playing within a fifty- to sixty-mile radius of Fort Worth.[9]

Both Wills and Arnspiger believed this experience with the minstrel

show had a significant influence on Wills's career. It was here, Arnspiger believed, that Wills developed the showmanship and ability to sell himself and his band. "The jig-dance and blackface routines and even the experiences selling medicine and candy were important." Even more important, "the background of this minstrel-type music on the show had a bearing on the development of Bob's jazz or western swing."[10] Arnspiger, who felt Wills's career "in blues and jazz" began here,[11] was not aware of the contacts Wills had already had with Negro folk music during his youth in the cotton camps and cotton fields of East and West Texas. The medicine show simply brought together and reinforced some of the important musical experiences of his childhood and young manhood. Because he had performed as a blackface comic on medicine shows, some of his band members later assumed that his talking to his musicians, calling them "Brother Stricklin" or wailing out "Lawd, Lawd," "Hallelujah, amen," or "You're a man after my own heart—with a razor," was due to his minstrel background. When I asked Bob explicitly if his wisecracking and talking on the bandstand came from his medicine show experience, he said it did not. He said he grew up playing with and living close to Negroes and that part of his style came *directly* from them. His work in these minstrel shows gave him an opportunity to express the folkways and folk music of the Negroes he had grown up with in East and West Texas. He never did this necessarily as show;[12] it was more a way to express his feelings. Throughout his entire career, Bob's life with the blacks in his formative years, his firsthand knowledge and love of their folk music, and his experience in American minstrelsy always influenced and colored his music.[13]

Jim Rob's first recording, made in the fall of 1929 for the Brunswick Record Corporation, reflected this black influence. It is not clear why he and Herman got the opportunity to record for a leading company so soon after they began playing together. They had appeared on various Fort Worth radio stations, and a Brunswick representative may have heard them. Or an A&R man may have seen them perform at the medicine show. In any event, at the request of Brunswick, they went to Dallas on November 1, 1929, and cut two sides. The first was "Gulf Coast Blues," from the repertory of Wills's favorite, Bessie Smith; the second was "Wills Breakdown," from his family's repertory. The recordings were evidently not successful, and if they were ever released, they did not sell very well. Nevertheless, this marked the beginning of Wills's recording career, which was to last more than forty-four years. These first recordings demonstrate that the blues of the blacks and the frontier fiddle music of his family were the earliest and most important influences on his career, and the more he brought them together during the next few years, the more his style would become distinctively his own.[14]

Just before Christmas, 1929, the medicine show closed in Alvarado. Bob, broke as usual, barbered a few days there before returning to Fort Worth.[15] He not only had his own wife and daughter to provide for, he also felt he must send any money he could to his father and his family in West Texas. Times were hard everywhere, and the Depression was getting worse every day. Bob was fortunate to have had experience in barbering, and in fact he still thought his future lay in that profession, not in music. He barbered in several Fort Worth shops, the longest at a shop on Third Street, downtown. He probably did some barbering as late as 1932.[16] If he barbered when he returned to Fort Worth in the winter of 1930, it was not for very long. Shortly afterwards, he went to West Texas to play a few dances with his father, but he was back in Fort Worth at least by early spring of that year.

In the meantime, Arnspiger and Wills had not seen each other since the medicine show closed. They happened to meet in a Fort Worth drugstore that spring and decided to begin playing dances again, in and near Fort Worth.[17] Arnspiger was also playing a radio show with some other musicians over station KTAT.[18] When a job opened unexpectedly for a fiddler on the show, Arnspiger began to look for Wills. They had not played a dance in several nights, and Arnspiger had difficulty finding him. He learned that the John Wills family was in Fort Worth and that Bob was at their hotel, but it was 4:00 A.M. before Arnspiger finally found the right hotel. John Wills and his family had almost "starved out" in West Texas, had been working in East Texas, and had stopped in Fort Worth just for the night. They were leaving for West Texas that morning. Bob Wills, penniless and discouraged, had planned to go back to West Texas with the family. John Wills told Bob to "go ahead and audition, and if he didn't get the job to come on home."[19]

This was a turning point in Wills's career, for had he left Fort Worth that day with his family, he might never have continued in music and show business. Nearly a year had passed since he left Turkey, and his finances were in worse condition than when he first arrived in Fort Worth. Things looked dark in so many ways that morning about 5:00 A.M. as he and Herman walked to the hotel where the studios were located. In a little while, even before the Texas sun came up, things began to look much brighter. He got the job. The Arlington chicken hatchery sponsoring the show agreed to pay Wills the same as Arnspiger, fifteen dollars a week. This was not as much as he had often made in one night playing dances in West Texas, but that was before the Depression, and fifteen dollars a week was good for Fort Worth in the spring of 1930. Many musicians were playing on the streets for what they could get in tips.[20] More importantly, it restored Bob's confidence in himself; again he believed he might have a

future in music. This show probably did not last beyond spring or early summer, but it gave Wills time to get better established in Fort Worth and find other places to perform.

Herman and Bob played this show six days a week. Since the broadcast was at 6:30 A.M., they had the rest of the day and the nights free. Because of the publicity they received by being on a daily broadcast, they were asked to play more dances than ever before. In Fort Worth they played at what were called house parties or house dances. Actually, these were really just country dances moved to town. They were very popular in the Southwest until Prohibition was repealed and dance halls and taverns became more plentiful. These house dances, of course, were not open to all the community like the ranch dances in West Texas were; only friends and acquaintances were invited. Since the people who attended had generally moved to the city from rural areas, they wanted the same music and dances they were accustomed to at country dances. Wills and Arnspiger, adopting the imposing title Wills Fiddle Band,[21] played about the same music the Wills family played down between the rivers in West Texas.[22]

At one of these house dances in Fort Worth, Wills met the man who later became the third member of the Wills Fiddle Band, Wills's best friend, and an early pioneer of western music. One night some fellows showed up at a dance, very well dressed, smoking cigars, and with a cocky air about them that worried Wills. "Here come a bunch of smart alecs," Wills warned Arnspiger, "I've got their number right now. Think they're goin' to come and make fun of us country people. The first move any of 'em makes I'll crash this fiddle over his head."[23] Wills was always defensive about having been reared in poverty and in the country. Some people no doubt did make fun of him because of his humble beginning, but it was often only his imagination that led him to judge others unfairly. He soon saw that his judgment in this case was too hasty. These men were friends of the host; they were cordial to everyone and soon joined in a square dance. When Wills played "St. Louis Blues," one of the strangers sang part of it with him, and his fifteen-year-old brother later relieved Arnspiger by playing the guitar. The man introduced himself as Milton Brown. Wills offered him a job singing with the "band" and told his brother, Durwood, he could play guitar with them when he was not in school. Milton Brown had been a salesman for the Henry Lowe Cigar Company, but the Depression had just forced it to close its doors. He and his brother accepted Wills's offer, and the Wills Fiddle Band doubled in size.

This was the beginning of Milton's career as a professional; other than singing at church in the choir or as a soloist now and then, he had had no previous experience. One of his first appearances was at a medicine show. He was not officially hired at the time, but Wills asked him to sing and gave

him half of the ten dollars he got for the job. This was the first money Milton Brown ever made in music and show business.[24]

Arnspiger, Brown, and Wills often played for medicine shows after that, but they all agreed dances were where the money was. They continued to play house dances and by the summer of 1930 had begun playing every Saturday night at Eagles' Hall in downtown Fort Worth. Eagles' Hall, owned by a fraternal organization, was quite large, and since dances there required a great deal more volume, Bob hired Frank Barnes with his five-string banjo. This was the only time Bob ever used a five-string banjo in any of his bands. Barnes did not stay with the band very long, and he played only at Eagles' Hall. With this one exception, Wills always used a tenor banjo, and his banjoists played in the tradition of New Orleans jazzmen, never in bluegrass or country style.[25] At Eagles' Hall, the Wills Fiddle Band numbered five, counting Durwood Brown, who played guitar at most of their dances, though still in school. At these hall dances they played much of the same music Wills had always played. He had the only instrument in the band that could successfully carry a melody for dancing; the other three instrumentalists generally played rhythm.

But the band needed to learn new selections. Many of the people who came to the hall dances had different musical tastes from those who attended country and house dances. Though they liked the old-time music Wills had learned from his family, many of them were city born, and they expected to hear more contemporary music also. They were aware of what was going on musically all over the nation—the NBC radio network was nearly a half decade old by that time. This was still the Jazz Age, and they heard the swing in all kinds of dance music on the radio and on phonographs. If Wills was to be successful, he would have to move closer to this music. And he did. As *Time* later put it, "His trick was to bring ranch-house music nearer to the city."[26] The Wills Fiddle Band made friends with Will Ed Kemble of Kemble Brothers Furniture Company in downtown Fort Worth. Kemble Brothers was known for its broad selection of records, and the members of the band spent many hours every week listening to the newest releases[27]—popular songs, blues, dixieland jazz, ballads, and "race music." Durwood Brown said, "We listened to all kinds of music, but especially whatever kind of music people dance by."[28] Kemble liked to have them rehearse in his store; they often played along as the records spun,[29] broadening their repertory all the while. They remained close friends with Kemble and later played a radio broadcast every Saturday from Kemble's.[30]

Though Wills was eager to learn new dance tunes and move closer to popular music, he knew too much about musical tastes in Fort Worth to move too far, just then, from the traditional fiddle band.[31] After all, he was

still in demand at house dances, where this kind of music was expected. And his fiddle band was getting all the exposure it could in the area, which helped bring even more dancers to his performances. Once, when he and Arnspiger were still on the hatchery show at KTAT, the manager of the station, as a publicity stunt, offered a fifty-dollar reward to anyone who could beat Wills at fiddling. He did not know that Wills was also playing on two other stations, violating the rules of all three stations. A few days after offering the reward, he called Wills in and said, "Bob I heard a fiddle player this afternoon that was good, I don't say he was better than you are, but he was just as good. You'd better not let me lose that $50."[32] Bob was not so concerned about the station's fifty dollars as he was about his job if his triple role was found out.[33]

In the summer of 1930, Wills's reputation as a fiddler spread even more. Station KFJZ had begun an old fiddlers' contest that spring which lasted six or eight weeks. Judging was done by the radio audience. Listeners sent in votes for their favorite team, a team consisting of a fiddler plus a guitarist or banjoist. Wills and Arnspiger entered as the Wills Fiddle Band. Each week teams were eliminated until, finally, there were only two teams in the contest. The finals were held in a Fort Worth park before a crowd of seven thousand and were broadcast over KFJZ. The Wills Fiddle Band was named champion, and Bob and Herman each received a fifty-dollar gold piece as a trophy. Arnspiger said they went right downtown and bought new clothes: "We each had only one shirt and one pair of pants at the time, and we were practically barefooted. The soles were completely gone on our shoes."[34]

Bob Wills was now one of the most famous fiddlers not only in West Texas; by winning over the best fiddlers in the Fort Worth area, he had become recognized throughout North Central Texas as well. Frontier folk music had moved to town, and the people there liked it.[35]

1. Bob Wills; Harold Ham; Mrs. F. O. Ham; Jewel Hardaway; John Luther Garner; Edna Wills; Edna Wills, "What I Know." Edna said her husband went to Fort Worth in July or August of 1929. See also Ruth Sheldon, *Hubbin' It: The Life of Bob Wills* (Tulsa: Privately published, 1938), pp. 81–82.

2. Bob Wills; Edna Wills; Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* p. 86.

3. Jennie McKenzie; Bob Wills. Wills and his family, and later his father's family, stayed with Mrs. McKenzie, who ran a rooming house in Fort Worth in the early thirties. Earlier she taught school in New Mexico, when Wills was in Roy working as a barber. Edna said she and Robbie Jo joined Wills about two weeks after he went to Fort Worth.

4. Edna Wills, "What I Know"; Edna Wills Scrapbook; Bob Wills; Al Stricklin.

5. Jesse Ashlock.

6. Herman Arnspiger. Bob Wills commented later that Doc never allowed more than four musicians.

7. Herman Arnspiger.

8. Ibid.

9. Bob Wills; Herman Arnspiger. By "crash of 1929," Arnspiger evidently meant the depression or economic slowdown in the spring and summer rather than the actual crash on Wall Street in October. The evidence indicates that he and Wills teamed up in the summer of 1929 or early in the fall at the very latest. Also Edna Wills.

10. Herman Arnspiger. June Whalin told me that in the early thirties Bob himself often danced during radio broadcasts and at dances and that his dancing was remarkable for its rhythm and showmanship. A four-foot-square board was kept in the studio for Bob to dance on. For background on the minstrel show, see Robert C. Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974).

11. Herman Arnspiger.

12. Joe Ferguson; Smokey Dacus; Sleepy Johnson; Al Stricklin; Leon McAuliffe; Herman Arnspiger; John Luther Garner; Othel Stubb; Dewitt Huffines; Mrs. F. O. Ham; Laverne Simmons Barnhill; Leon Rausch; Johnny Gimble; Keith Coleman; Wayne Johnson; Woodie Wood; Betty Wills; Bob Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; Danny Alguire. See Dan Hicks's review of Merle Haggard's *A Tribute to the Best Damn Fiddle Player in the World (or, My Salute to Bob Wills),* Capitol ST 638, in *Rolling Stone,* No. 120 (Oct. 26, 1972), p. 60, and my comments on *A Tribute to Bob,* United Artists SP-105.

13. Listen, e.g., to Wills's early recordings of "St. Louis Blues" (1935) and "Swing Blues No. 2" (1936).

14. Herman Arnspiger remembered that he and Bob made these recordings and that "Gulf Coast Blues" was one of them, but could not remember how or why they got the opportunity or any other details concerning the session. Even before I learned of this earliest recording session (from Frank Driggs of RCA through Bob Pinson; see Pinson to me, Feb. 11, 1975), I had thought Wills must have heard Bessie Smith's "Gulf Coast Blues," because he injected some of the lyrics ("you got a mouthful of gimme and handful of much obliged") into other of his blues recordings and performances. Wills may have owned this recording at one time. He was certainly familiar with it, for he recorded both Bessie Smith's "Gulf Coast Blues" and her "Down Hearted Blues," which had been released together in 1923 on Columbia A-3844. Though Bessie also recorded "New Gulf Coast Blues," in 1925, it was the original that Wills knew and loved. See Brian Rust, *Jazz Records 1897–1942* (London: Storyville Publications, 1969), pp. 1524, 1528.

15. Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* p. 93; Herman Arnspiger; Bob Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; Edna Wills, "What I Know." Listen especially to my interview with Edna Wills.

16. Durwood Brown; Bob Wills; Jesse Ashlock. In his interview with Ken Griffis, Ashlock said Wills barbered a good deal while in Fort Worth, though Wills could not remember barbering after he started the Light Crust Doughboys, i.e., after late 1930 or early 1931. Bob was probably in error, because he had a barber's license, issued by the State Board of Barber Examiners, at least until November, 1932. His license for 1932 has survived the last forty-odd years and is a prized possession of the family (Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook). Bob may have secured his license in 1932 only as a precautionary measure. Edna Wills did not remember Bob's working as a barber during their years in Fort Worth.

17. Herman Arnspiger.

18. Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* p. 93.

19. Herman Arnspiger; Edna Wills; Bob Wills.

20. Herman Arnspiger; Sleepy Johnson; Bob Wills; Kermit Whalin; June Whalin.

21. Herman Arnspiger; Sleepy Johnson; Durwood Brown; Bob Wills; Edna Wills; June Whalin. For a brief discussion of the Wills Fiddle Band, see Bob Healy, "The Light Crust Doughboys," *Country Directory,* No. 3 (1962), p. 21, and "The Light Crust Doughboys," *Folk Style,* No. 9 (n.d.), p. 5.

22. Arnspiger said Wills already had the two-four beat that he later made famous, and he insisted on it at that time. Actually, there was nothing original about the two-four beat Wills used in his rhythm section. It was merely the beat of New Orleans jazz and was quite widespread before Bob ever played his first dance. Bob introduced it into western music in the 1930s and later into country music when country artists began emulating his style (see

chap. 21). See especially John McEuen's liner notes to *Hall of Fame: Bob Wills and Tommy Duncan,* United Artists UAS-9962, and my interview with Smokey Dacus, Wills's first drummer.

23. Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* pp. 96–97; Edna Wills; Robbie Jo Wills Calhoun; Edna Wills Scrapbook.

24. Durwood Brown was very helpful on Wills's Fort Worth period. Milton Brown was killed in an auto accident in 1936. Unfortunately, he left no memoirs of these years. Also Herman Arnspiger; Bob Wills; Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* pp. 97–99. Listen especially to Mary Helen Brown.

25. Durwood Brown; Jesse Ashlock; June Whalin; Kermit Whalin; Herman Arnspiger; Bob Wills; Sleepy Johnson; Marvin Montgomery. Montgomery said, "No one used a five-string banjo in Fort Worth. We used the tenor banjo like they used in dixieland."

26. "Strictly by Ear," *Time,* Feb. 11, 1946, pp. 48–49.

27. Durwood Brown. For an excellent discussion of how Kemble Brothers Furniture Company befriended the Wills Fiddle Band, see the Truett Kimzey interview in C. L. Douglas and Frances Miller, "The Life Story of W. Lee O'Daniel—A Saga of American Success," *Fort Worth Press,* Aug. 17, 1938.

28. Durwood Brown; Kermit Whalin; Bob Wills. I use the term *race music* as it was used in record catalogs in the 1930s for records by black artists which were often sold only in ghettos or other places where there was a heavy concentration of blacks. The lyrics generally depicted areas of black culture, and the music, rich in blues and jazz, was usually "hot" and swingy. See especially Tony Russell, *Blacks, Whites and Blues* (New York: Stein and Day, 1970), pp. 85–88.

29. Sleepy Johnson. Johnson was not in the band at this time, but he recalled this is what they did before and after he joined the group.

30. Bob Wills; June Whalin; Herman Arnspiger; Kermit Whalin.

31. Healy, "Light Crust Doughboys," *Country Directory,* p. 21, and *Folk Style,* p. 5.

32. Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* p. 96; Bob Wills; Herman Arnspiger.

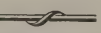
33. Bob Wills; Edna Wills; Edna Wills Scrapbook; Edna Wills, "What I Know"; Kermit Whalin; June Whalin; Sleepy Johnson; Durwood Brown; Herman Arnspiger.

34. Herman Arnspiger.

35. June Whalin; Kermit Whalin; Jesse Ashlock; Durwood Brown; Marvin Montgomery; Joe Andrews; Herman Arnspiger; Johnnie Lee Wills; Johnny Bond.

5

Western Jazz



They got a fiddler there that always slickens his hair,
An' folks he sure do pull some bow.

"Memphis Blues"

I've always loved dixieland jazz.

Bob Wills

Winning the contest in Fort Worth helped spread Wills's fame as a fiddler, but it also cost him his job. KTAT unceremoniously fired Wills and Arnspiger when the fiddlers' contest made it obvious to the management that the pair had also been playing on two other stations. Wills knew very well by then that he must have a regular radio broadcast if he was to be successful with his dance band. He had discovered by the summer of 1930 what Guy Lombardo discovered three years before and what others had discovered in the early twenties.[1] With the bridge burned behind him at KTAT, Bob began trying to get on WBAP and KFJZ, where he had performed sporadically at various times.[2]

Wills decided to try KFJZ first. He appears to have paid little attention to such things as appointments at that time. He burst into the KFJZ studio with his band, Herman Arnspiger and Milton Brown, frightening the secretary. "Mr. Stricklin, will you please come in here a moment," she called. Alton Stricklin, the assistant to the program director, entered the little reception room and saw "three guys standing there, and they were hungry looking, and they needed a shave. One of them had something in a flour sack; the other one had a guitar strapped across his back, hanging over his back like he was carrying a rifle or something." Stricklin was almost as startled as the secretary. "It was Mr. Bob Wills with his fiddle in a flour sack. . . . He had hocked it a few days before to get some money and had borrowed it from the hock shop so he could give an audition on KFJZ."[3]

Wills asked for an audition. "I took them to the main studio," Stricklin recalled. "It was only eight by ten. The whole operation for KFJZ was no larger than the average living room." They set up their instruments and

began to play "Who Broke the Lock on the Hen House Door." Stricklin had just left Baylor University, where he had been playing with some college boys in a jazz band. Up to that time he "had never heard any country music, didn't understand it, didn't dig it, didn't know what it was. I thought it was comedy." He called in the station manager. "We got practically hysterical because we thought they were trying to be funny." Wills was probably furious. As Stricklin learned later, "they weren't trying to be funny. Bob put his heart and soul into that music." They then played "Four or Five Times" and sang a novelty jazz piece called "If You Can't Get Five Take Two." Stricklin told the station manager, "Look, that's something different. I've never heard anything like it, and I don't think the people have." They appeared to be comedians, Stricklin said, because they had just come from a medicine show, where they cracked jokes, talked in minstrel jargon, and tried to be funny. The station manager, impressed by what he thought was comedy, gave them a show from eight to eight-thirty in the morning. "We have no money," he told Wills. "When boys make money here, they get a sponsor." Stricklin continued, "They called two days later from the post office and said there was so much mail for the station one man can't carry it, better bring a pickup or something." It was "hundreds of cards and letters that came in wanting to know who was playing this comical music." They loved it, he recalled; some thought it the best they ever heard.[4] Ironically, Stricklin, who thought this music so strange, became Wills's piano player in 1935 and helped make that "comical music" famous. The Wills Fiddle Band played only about two weeks on KFJZ. Wills probably left because a better show was offered by a bigger station.[5]

In the late summer or early fall of 1930, WBAP hired Wills and his group for a radio show sponsored by the Aladdin Lamp Company.[6] Wills, Arnspiger, and Milton Brown opened the show as the Aladdin Laddies. Why Wills got this break with so many other musicians out of work and wanting jobs is not clear. Perhaps one reason was that his music was new. Old-time fiddle music was, of course, very popular in the WBAP listening area, and Wills played enough of it to satisfy this audience. But he had already borrowed enough from jazz and popular music to give his music a broader appeal and a swing that standard fiddle bands did not have, so that he could attract a second audience. The wide response to his broadcasts on KTAT and KFJZ, the publicity he received by winning fiddle contests, and the popularity of his music for dancing also helped get him this show on WBAP. Friends in Fort Worth helped in the negotiations.[7] The Aladdin show was on the air only a few months, but it was the biggest break Wills had had up to that time. First of all, it provided a steady income; he was not only supporting his wife and daughter, he was also helping his family in West Texas.[8] The broadcasts also put Wills and the Laddies on one of the

most powerful stations in the Southwest, thus spreading their music into areas where it had never been heard. Finally, and most important, the program helped build a successful dance schedule and eventually led to a much better radio show.

About the time their broadcasts began for Aladdin, the Wills Fiddle Band began playing for dances at a place in Fort Worth called Crystal Springs.[9] Crystal Springs was originally just a swimming pool and clubhouse for the family and friends of a Fort Worth building contractor. When the public began renting the clubhouse for parties and dances, the contractor, Sam Cunningham, built a sprawling dance pavilion with lumber salvaged from the Camp Bowie army barracks of World War I vintage. Crystal Springs became famous not only because Wills and others played there, but also because its customers included Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow and other underworld figures. Its ceiling was low, and supporting posts were everywhere.[10] This made dancing both clumsy and exciting as one guided his partner in and around and through the array of posts. Nevertheless, it was acceptable, and the people came to hear the Wills Fiddle Band.

When they first began playing at Crystal Springs, the band consisted of Wills, Arnspiger, and the two Browns. With the publicity and radio coverage they received over WBAP, they drew larger crowds than ever before,[11] and the Aladdin Laddies soon became one of the most popular dance bands in the Fort Worth area. Wills added another musician for the dances at Crystal Springs, to play rhythm tenor banjo, though he did not play the Aladdin show. Clifton Johnson (later nicknamed Sleepy) had had a fiddle band in Fort Worth and wanted to hire Wills as his fiddler. "But when I went to his home," Johnson said, "he hired me."[12] Jesse Ashlock, still in his teens, also came regularly to the dances at Crystal Springs. Though he had played the violin since he was nine, Ashlock could play only "eight or nine breakdowns." He admired Wills and wanted to play the fiddle so much that Wills bought him a fiddle and took time to teach him more about it. Ashlock said he would sit "right behind Bob and play real low and learn the tunes he played."[13] Inadvertently, Bob was training a future member of his band and one of the best jazz fiddlers he ever had in his organization. Though Ashlock was never a regular member of the band at Crystal Springs, Bob often let him play a few tunes at the dances there.

Considering the Depression and the lack of money in the country, the Aladdin Laddies did remarkably well at Crystal Springs. Economically, the band was a "commonwealth band": each member received an equal share of the profit. Sam Cunningham had offered to pay each man two dollars a night, and most of the musicians thought a guarantee of two dollars a night looked good, with millions unemployed and "Hoovervilles" going up

around the country. But Wills held out for payment on a percentage basis, as his family had always done at the ranch dances in West Texas.[14] His reasoning, like that of his father with respect to cotton farming, was simple but sound. If he could make money for another man, he could make money for himself. He was right. The first night they played at Crystal Springs each man made eleven dollars, and the second Saturday night each earned nineteen dollars. Their continued financial success at Crystal Springs fixed more firmly in Wills's mind the notion that music for dancing was where the money and his own future lay.[15]

Music for dancing—this idea was significant in Wills's career, and it is necessary at this point to digress from the narrative to discuss this third major influence on his life and music. When I discussed his first public appearance as a fiddler, I noted that his music was influenced by the West and that the fiddle would be his dominant instrument. This third factor was also there at the ranch house in 1915, when Jim Rob was only ten years old—namely, that his music was then, and ever after, *dance music.*[16] His financial success at Crystal Springs underscored a concept his father and grandfather had impressed on him in his childhood in West Texas. Like the practical frontier, where a good deal of his music and style originated, Wills's music was always pragmatic—it allowed people to dance. This is not to say it was without aesthetic value. Some selections from the Wills repertory have shared the realism and expressiveness of other folk or folk-based arts. His success in recordings and radio and movies affirms the fact that many found his music pleasing to merely sit and listen to. Wills was also successful performing in theaters and before grandstands in every section of the nation. Nevertheless, his principal objective remained the same from his first dance in 1915 to the end of his career—to play for dancing.[17]

Bob Wills's main contribution to American music is closely related to, if not the direct result of, this objective.[18] Moreover, it was because of this emphasis that Wills developed a completely new American music. In playing dances in his earliest years, Wills used only the traditional frontier musical instruments, fiddle, guitar, and banjo. But through his emphasis on dance music, he eventually used them in a nontraditional way.

Though somewhat isolated in his earliest years, Wills certainly did not develop his style and tastes in a musical vacuum. At least by 1923, and perhaps before, by listening to radio in Amarillo, he became aware of the kind of music other dance bands were playing.[19] Before his fifteenth birthday the Jazz Age was under way; during his formative years as a musician, jazz was beginning to spread across America from the Storyville district of New Orleans.[20] It had a particular appeal to young Wills, because, above all, it was the music that made the Lost Generation *dance.*

Jazz and dance music were synonymous, and Bob Wills himself identified jazz as one of the most important components of his music and style.[21]

How could young Wills in West Texas, far away from New Orleans, have come under the influence of jazz? True, no riverboats took the music across those dry Texas plains. But there were carriers of this music besides those who went up the Mississippi. Negro cotton pickers were not so colorful and famous as riverboat men, but their music was just as authentic. And some of them brought the blues and rhythm of jazz to East and West Texas in Wills's youth, several years before the exportation of jazz in the riverboats. In fact, some of the basic elements of jazz were nurtured by black Texans. Scott Joplin, the Father of Ragtime, was born in Texarkana, Texas. Jazz guitarist Charlie Christian was Texas born. Among the great blues singers from Texas were Blind Lemon Jefferson, Lillian Glenn, and Victoria Spivey.[22] Huddie "Leadbelly" Ledbetter and Jefferson, not to mention other Negro folk and blues singers and jazz musicians, were in Dallas and Fort Worth in the years when Wills was playing at Crystal Springs.[23]

One of the best trombonists in jazz history, Jack Teagarden, was born the same year as Wills, 1905, in the West Texas town of Vernon, less than a hundred miles from the river farm where Wills spent his youth.[24] Like Wills, Teagarden credited the blacks, especially the impact of their gospel singing in revival tents near Vernon, with influencing his music and rhythmic style.[25] Perhaps even more significant is the fact that in his early career in West Texas, Jack played with hillbilly or string bands. Interestingly, Teagarden often played the fiddle part, and this, he claimed, had a lot to do with his technical development. Like Wills, he played many of the traditional fiddle tunes, like "Turkey in the Straw," but, of course, he played them on the trombone.[26]

The extent to which jazz permeated the Southwest, West Texas in particular, is shown by the jazzmen like Teagarden which it produced.[27] If one excludes New Orleans itself, Wills probably could not have grown up in many places more permeated by Negro folk music and jazz. The question, then, is not how Wills could have come under the influence of jazz. The question is how a dance musician such as Bob Wills could have *escaped* that influence in the 1920s and thirties. Like so many of the creative geniuses in American music, Wills was a product of the Jazz Age.

Bob Wills's most important contribution to American music was the fact that he produced the dance music of jazz with traditional folk or country instruments. He did much more, however. He later combined the stringed instruments of the frontier with the brass and reed instruments of traditional jazz to produce a new kind of jazz or swing. His music is neither–nor: it is neither the frontier music he learned from his family, nor is it traditional jazz. The fiddle music of the frontier and the beat he

learned down between the rivers were always dominant, and the jazz idioms, the most important of which he added before he left West Texas, were also always important elements in his music.

Not surprisingly, record companies and others have had difficulty describing Wills's music and style. His first two recordings for Brunswick, in 1929, and the two sides he and the Doughboys made for Victor in 1932 were string music with a jazz dance beat. With a couple of exceptions, these were the only recordings he made with just traditional stringed instruments.[28] As he added other instruments, particularly brass and reeds, his records were labeled "Old Time Music," "Hot String Band," "Stomp Dance," "Hot Dance," and "Novelty Hot Dance."[29] Trade journals called it "folk music," and *Time* referred to Wills as a "backwoods Lombardo."[30] The *Time* reporter showed a good deal of insight (though "backwoods Bob Crosby" would have been better); he recognized the dual influence in Wills's music. Considering the general difficulty in classifying his style, though, one is tempted to say of it what Duke Ellington said of Louis Armstrong's music: it is "beyond category."[31]

Blues, rags, and jazz stomps have all been part of the Wills repertory. "Gulf Coast Blues" and W. C. Handy's "St. Louis Blues" were two of the selections Wills used at his dances in the Fort Worth area when he first arrived there in 1929. In his initial session for Brunswick in 1929, he recorded "Gulf Coast Blues," and in his 1935 session with his Texas Playboys, "St. Louis Blues" was one of the first selections he recorded; in fact, of the twenty sides he cut in the latter session, no fewer than half were jazz. Moreover, when Bob Wills performed "St. Louis Blues," he sang it as one would expect to hear it done by a blues or New Orleans jazz singer. Other compositions he used early in his career were "Basin Street Blues" (recorded by Louis Armstrong in 1928), "Empty Bed Blues" (recorded by Bessie Smith in 1928), "Drunkard Blues" (which is merely the music of "St. James Infirmary" with different lyrics—recorded by King Oliver in 1930), "Jelly Roll Blues" (written in 1915 by Jelly Roll Morton), and "Darktown Strutters' Ball" (written in 1915 by the black artist and composer Shelton Brooks and introduced by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band).[32] The Wills Fiddle Band listened to race records, learned the music and lyrics, and adapted them to their own style. Sleepy Johnson and Johnnie Lee Wills remembered taking "Osage Stomp," the first piece Bob ever recorded with his Texas Playboys, directly from a Negro jazz band that called it "Rukus Juice Shuffle."[33] Wills also credited black tradition for one of the most popular selections he ever recorded. He had once worked in the West Texas cotton fields with an old Negro man who hummed a tune over and over. "As I worked the row next to him, I learned the tune," Wills told his musicians. He hummed the old Negro's tune, asked the band to help him

work it out more fully, and a piece of jazz or swing was born, called "Big Beaver."[34]

Another early influence on Wills's music was Jimmie Rodgers, one of the most popular recording artists in America during Wills's years in Fort Worth (1929–33). Rodgers is considered by most authorities as the Father of Country Music. But it was his jazz or blues side that Wills incorporated. Too little is said about the fact that Rodgers made his reputation as a blues singer and often recorded with jazz bands. He and the Empress of the Blues, Bessie Smith, grew up in the same section of the South, and their recordings show their styles to be quite similar.[35] When Wills recorded Jimmie Rodgers's music, it was nearly always his blues or jazz selections, rather than his ballads or country songs:[36] "Never No More Blues," "Mean Mama Blues," "Drunkard Blues" (to the tune of "Those Gambler's Blues"), "Mississippi Delta Blues," and "Gambling Polka Dot Blues," for example. The best explanation for this preference is that given by Johnnie Lee Wills: these Rodgers selections could more easily be made danceable.[37]

Not only were jazz and blues compositions among Bob Wills's favorites and often dominant in his repertory; stylistically, also, he was always close to jazz. When young Tommy Duncan auditioned for a singing position with the Wills band in Fort Worth in 1932, Wills asked him to sing "I Ain't Got Nobody" (a favorite with both Wills and Duncan), which the musical idols of Wills's formative years had recorded, Bessie Smith in 1925 and Emmett Miller in 1928. The latter, in this case, made the greater impression on Wills.[38] Miller recorded a jazz arrangement, with Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, Eddie Lang, and other jazz greats; Miller himself included a yodel when he sang it. Wills recorded the song three years after the Duncan audition, not in a western or country or popular style, but in a pure New Orleans jazz style, featuring horns complete with tailgate trombone. Duncan copied Miller's vocals, even the yodel, so closely that it was more an imitation than a stylistic similarity. As this example suggests, to fully comprehend the *basis* of Wills's music and style, one must study his recordings of the mid-1930s.[39]

Throughout his career, Wills incorporated every jazz idiom into his music: blue notes, syncopation, and, above all, improvisation. When Wills let one of his musicians take a chorus, he was free to improvise like a musician in a more traditional jazz band.[40] About when the Aladdin Laddies began playing at Crystal Springs, Wills, for the first time, had enough musicians in his band to allow them to occasionally take a chorus and improvise. In the early days of his Fort Worth band, only the guitar and banjo could take jazz choruses. Later this was also done with piano, steel guitar, trumpet, saxophone, clarinet, trombone, mandolin, and even the fiddle.

If the use of fiddles or violins in popular dance music appears unusual to modern Americans, it did not appear so in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries or the early years of the twentieth century. Wills's use of fiddles was more a revival than an innovation. The fiddle was also one of the first instruments American Negroes used to play dance tunes, blues, and rags and to "jazz up" all kinds of music. In 1753 the *Virginia Gazette* included an advertisement concerning a runaway slave "who took his fiddle with him." In the years after the Civil War, the violin was still called a "nigger fiddle," and Negroes used it to play jazz long before they used the white man's instruments.[41] "The fiddle is the favorite instrument of the Negro throughout as many of the Southern States as I have any knowledge of," George Washington Cable wrote his friend Joel Chandler Harris in 1884. Cable was quoted in the New York *Tribune* as saying, "I have listened half a night to negroes singing to their banjo in Louisiana. . . . It is a fact that where you find one negro with a banjo, you find a hundred with a fiddle." W. C. Handy told of the influence on his own career of an eighty-year-old Negro who fiddled, sang, and stomped "four beats to the bar."[42] Two lines in Handy's "Memphis Blues" depict the blacks' use of the violin in jazz:

> They got a fiddler there that always slickens his hair,
> An' folks he sure do pull some bow.[43]

The evidence reveals that Wills's use of fiddles in jazz was not new. He merely used an instrument in dance music that most Negro jazzmen had already discarded or were discarding in the 1920s and thirties.[44] He was innovative in his use of several violins, or a "fiddle ensemble." Violins often constituted his front line. Though Wills himself rarely took jazz choruses, Jesse Ashlock, Louis Tierney, Joe Holley, and other "hot fiddlers" he employed took choruses with the fiddle, improvised, and like other jazz musicians (Louis Armstrong, for instance) seemed to search for notes they never quite found. In fact, Jesse Ashlock stated, "I try to do the same thing on fiddle that jazzmen do on a trumpet."[45] During the period Wills played the Oriental Theatre in Chicago, Joe Holley, Rip Ramsey, and other band members sat in with Louis Armstrong, Henry "Red" Allen, J. C. Higginbotham, and other jazzmen at the Down Beat Room. Wills's musicians were quite at home playing with Satchmo and other jazz greats. Johnny Gimble, another of Wills's fiddlers, played with Pete Fountain in New Orleans and did not have to alter his style in the least; he played exactly the way he did with Wills—in a New Orleans style. According to Gimble, now a Nashville sideman, the main difference between Wills's music and Nashville music is that country artists want their selections to sound the same every time they perform, while Wills never played a song the same way twice. He ap-

preciated the liberating qualities of jazz in Wills's style: "The thing I liked about playing for Bob," he said, "was I was freer than in any other band I was ever in."[46]

Whether it involved the fiddles or brass or reeds, Wills insisted on improvised jazz choruses. Though he never told an individual how or what to play in the chorus, it was generally understood that each musician was to play phrases that were related to but did not merely repeat the melody. If the selection had lyrics, the vocalist sang after a few introductory bars of melody; after the vocalist had finished, Wills called on someone to take a chorus of several bars.[47] On those rare occasions when musicians played the melody, they still improvised on it. But in over 90 percent of the choruses they created really fresh phrases. The more creative and spectacular, the more Wills loved it. He *never* wanted a musician to play straight melody when he gave him a chorus.[48]

Jazz expert Richard B. Allen, after listening to recordings Wills made between 1935 and 1942, concluded that the improvising in Wills's band was more than even the term *improvisation* generally implies. In Wills's case it was "more extemporaneous improvisation" and therefore did not sound rehearsed, because his musicians did not repeat themselves over and over. According to the same scholar, this gave Wills's music "more originality" and made his music closer stylistically to New Orleans Negro musical style than to white dixieland.[49]

Such improvisation is the heart, if not the soul, of jazz, and it was basic to the Bob Wills style. He even used it with frontier fiddle tunes. On such tunes Wills would begin either by playing the melody through on his fiddle or by leading his fiddle ensemble (himself and one or more other fiddlers) through the melody. He then called on another musician, often on two or three musicians, to take choruses before he came back to the melody. He followed essentially this same New Orleans style in all his music, regardless of what he played. It was more obvious, of course, in his recordings of traditional jazz selections like "Wang Wang Blues," "I Ain't Got Nobody," "Back Home Again in Indiana," "I Wish I Could Shimmy like My Sister Kate," "St. Louis Blues," and "Careless Love," and in big-band swing selections like "Big Beaver," "Liebestraum," and "La Paloma."[50]

But the New Orleans style was there just as distinctively in selections that were considered western: "Oklahoma Hills," "Take Me Back to Tulsa," "Ride On My Prairie Pinto," "Cherokee Maiden," "El Rancho Grande," "Silver on the Sage."[51] Only when Wills played jazz selections with his horn band in the 1930s and early forties did he sound like standard jazz, and there were recordings in which he played dixieland that would have pleased a purist.[52] Even when he used just stringed instruments, the dixieland style was always there. If one had substituted horns for strings,

his music would not only have had the dixieland *style,* it would also have had the traditional dixieland *sound.*[53] In this sense, Bob Wills always played a form of jazz.[54]

In jazz, rhythm is second in importance only to improvisation; some have argued that rhythm is its most important aspect. Wills got his rhythm from all areas of the band, but above all he insisted on a two-four beat from the rhythm section. This is the beat New Orleans exported wholesale to the world after Storyville closed in 1917. Some people have assumed that Bob was the one who originated it and have called it the "Bob Wills beat."[55] He was the first to introduce drums into western music and was consequently responsible for the introduction of the two-four beat into what was later called country-and-western music. But the two-four beat had been part of New Orleans jazz since at least the early years of the twentieth century. Wills's first drummer used it in jazz bands before he ever played for Wills.[56] Wills's beat was a delightful extension from that free-wheeling New Orleans jazz that Les Brown once called "the happiest music in the world."[57]

"I've always loved dixieland jazz," Wills once said,[58] and there was no jazz idiom he did not use at one time or another. The more important idioms, such as syncopation, improvisation, and jazz rhythm, he employed all the time. In combining the elements of frontier fiddle music and jazz, Bob Wills created a new music that could as properly be called "western jazz" as "western swing": it was the jazz that made his western music swing.[59] Why was *western swing* the label that eventually caught on? In the 1930s the mainstream of New Orleans jazz was evolving in many areas of the country into another form of jazz, typified by the large dance bands led by Paul Whiteman, Fletcher Henderson, Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman, Bob Crosby, the Dorsey brothers, and Glenn Miller.[60] By the later 1930s the current term for these bands and their music was *swing,* and it was naturally extended to Wills's music.

Jazz was the basis of swing (as blues was the basis of jazz), and much of the earlier jazz tradition was dominant in swing. However, the larger bands of the Big Band Era toned it down or "cooled it off" with saxophones, much as a choir softens a soloist. The written arrangements that became common, while producing a more sophisticated music, tended to inhibit swing musicians; the result was a loss of spontaneity and, in most instances, a more subdued sound. By the late thirties, Wills's horn sections were also playing from written arrangements, and at times his music was pure swing.

Another difference between swing bands and traditional jazz bands was the tendency of the former to play more pop music than traditional jazz selections. Pop or popular music, as the trade defines it, is a conglomeration of everything from serious music to George Gershwin compositions, from Tin Pan Alley to Broadway musicals, from ballads and folk to

country and jazz.[61] Above all, its lyrics are romantic; they lack the realism and honesty of the blues, of folk or country songs. In this respect Wills remained closer to the swing bands (though in other areas he has been correctly credited with influencing the development of country music). His music, like that of the big swing bands, was for dancing, and people who dance want to be in a jovial spirit. Bob Wills knew dance audiences too well to sing songs about divorce, the heartbreak of broken homes, or even poverty during the Great Depression. Leon McAuliffe observed: "Our music is designed to make people forget these realistic things. We want them to be realistic and say, 'Yeah, there are problems over there. But let's have a good time.' . . . We were popular in that we were romantic." Even in songs with sad lyrics, McAuliffe declared that Wills had a "happy beat" and "in a way was satirizing" the problems suggested by such lyrics.[62]

Wills's musicians rarely, if ever, played a sad accompaniment, even when the lyrics were plaintive. They filled in breaks and spaces with happy sounds that were completely unrelated to any sad mood set by the lyrics. Al Stricklin might be banging on the piano, playing a happy jazz background that sounded as if he were having a great time, completely unaware of the words. After a singer's first vocal on a song, Wills would have someone take a jazz chorus that was also happy and lilting. He might even have two or three musicians each take a chorus, and by the time the vocalist began again, the listener would have almost forgotten the lyrics. Wills's youngest brother, Billy Jack, remarked, "Bob could play 'A Letter Edged in Black,' and it would sound happy."[63] Bob did like blues songs. But, as Leonard Bernstein has pointed out, regardless of how sad blues may be, there is always a happiness about them.[64]

Without exception, every former member of Wills's band interviewed for this study concluded, as Wills himself did, that what they were playing was always closer in music, lyrics, and style to jazz and swing than to any other genre. Wills took instruments often associated today with country music, added brass and reeds, and played a form of jazz known as swing. It was popular dance music. While the Aladdin Laddies were playing at Crystal Springs—when the Swing Era was in its infancy—Wills called it simply that: dance music. Eventually, he himself called it western swing.[65]

1. Bob Wills. Paul Whiteman, Lombardo commented, realized in the early 1920s that having a regular radio show made his dance music popular ("Lombardo Didn't Invent New Year's Eve, Just Made It Sweet," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram,* Dec. 31, 1971).

2. Ruth Sheldon, *Hubbin' It: The Life of Bob Wills* (Tulsa: Privately published, 1938), pp. 98–99; Bob Wills; Herman Arnspiger; Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook; Durwood Brown Scrapbook; Herman Arnspiger Scrapbook; Edna Wills; Edna Wills Scrapbook.

3. Alton Stricklin. Al, as he was known professionally, later joined the Wills band and played piano until 1941. Listen to his comments on *A Tribute to Bob,* United Artists SP-105.

4. Ibid. The fact that Wills was playing "Four or Five Times" at this stage in his career is

an indication of how early jazz influenced him. Richard B. Allen, of the Archive of New Orleans Jazz, told me he had known "Four or Five Times" only as jazz band repertory.

5. Stricklin could not remember (or never knew) why Wills left KFJZ.

6. Durwood Brown; Herman Arnspiger; Bob Wills; Edna Wills; Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* p. 99.

7. Bob Wills; Herman Arnspiger. Sleepy Johnson said John Dunnan was playing the show and asked Wills to help him with it. Shortly afterward, Dunnan left the show and turned it over to Wills.

8. Ruby Wills Sullivan; Bobby Taylor; Lorene Wills Burton; Johnnie Lee Wills; Luke Wills; Billy Jack Wills; Edna Wills.

9. For a brief history of this establishment, see Delbert Willis, "Sunday Beat—Crystal Springs: Hillbilly Mecca," *Fort Worth Press,* Aug. 23, 1959. See also "The Crystal Springs Ramblers," *Blue Yodeler,* No. 14 (n.d.), pp. 4–5; Edna Wills; Durwood Brown; Jesse Ashlock; Edna Wills Scrapbook.

10. Gene Hames; June Whalin; Kermit Whalin; Bob Wills; Jesse Ashlock; Leon McAuliffe; Durwood Brown; Joe Andrews.

11. Bob Wills; Durwood Brown; Herman Arnspiger; Kermit Whalin; June Whalin; Gene Hames.

12. Sleepy Johnson. For a brief account of Johnson's career, see Stephen F. Davis and Keith Titterington, " 'Sleepy' Johnson: Western Swing Pioneer," *Old Time Music,* No. 7 (Winter, 1972–73), pp. 8–11.

13. Jesse Ashlock; Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* pp. 99–100; Edna Wills, "What I Know." A very enlightening article on Ashlock is Ken Griffis, "The Jesse Ashlock Story," *JEMF Quarterly,* 8 (Autumn, 1972), 121–127.

14. O. W. Mayo; Sam Gibbs; Eldon Shamblin; Joe Andrews; Herman Arnspiger; Durwood Brown; June Whalin; Kermit Whalin. Wills employed this basis of payment throughout most of his career.

15. Bob Wills; Durwood Brown; Edna Wills; June Whalin; Kermit Whalin; Al Stricklin; Danny Alguire; Leon McAuliffe, Johnnie Lee Wills; Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* p. 100.

16. Bob Wills and all of his musicians I interviewed agreed that Wills's music was basically for dancing. Bob emphasized this again and again. Lee Ross, who sang with the band briefly in the fifties, did question this emphasis; his comments may be heard in "Tribute to Bob Wills," KPIK, Colorado Springs, 1974.

17. Bob Wills; Sam Gibbs; Johnnie Lee Wills; Betty Wills.

18. Ernest Tubb told me that Wills's greatest contribution to American music was his making "country music danceable."

19. Bob and Johnnie Lee Wills, and Rip Ramsey, who grew up with them, all said that by the early 1920s they were listening to jazz, blues, and anything else danceable, on both phonograph and radio. Also Laverne Simmons Barnhill; John Luther Garner; Lawrence Hedrick; Dewitt Huffines; Othel Stubb; Harold Ham; June Whalin; Kermit Whalin.

20. See, e.g., Irving L. Sablosky, *American Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), pp. 145–147.

21. Bob Wills. Every member of his band, whether playing with him in 1931 or 1969, believed they played a form of jazz, sometimes pure or traditional jazz. Listen to Sleepy Johnson; Kermit Whalin; Herman Arnspiger; Woodie Wood; Jamie McIntosh; Wayne Johnson; Johnny Gimble; Ray DeGeer; Leon Rausch; Glenn Rhees; Danny Alguire.

22. Sablosky, *American Music,* p. 114; Gilbert Chase, *America's Music: From the Pilgrims to the Present,* 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), pp. 436–437. For examples of the Texas-style blues by Glenn, Spivey, Jefferson, and other black Texans, listen to *The Story of the Blues,* Columbia G 30008, and *Women of the Blues,* RCA Victor LPV-534. Examples of white Texas blues singers are "St. James Infirmary," *Jack Teagarden,* RCA Victor LPV-528; Bob Wills, "Downhearted Blues," unissued Brunswick master DAL 219 (1937), "St. Louis Blues," Vocalion 03076 (1935), "Trouble Trouble Blues," MGM 11322 (1952); Tommy Duncan, "Empty Bed Blues," Vocalion 04184 (1938), "Honey What You Gonna Do," (recorded in 1941, issued in 1973 on *The Bob Wills Anthology,* Columbia KG 32416), "Brain Cloudy Blues," Columbia 37313 (1946).

23. The influence of Blind Lemon Jefferson is revealed in Wills's recordings of "Swing Blues No. 1" and "Swing Blues No. 2." See the liner notes by Chris Strachwitz and Bob Pinson to *Western Swing,* Old Timey LP-105. Listen also to my comments on *A Tribute to Bob.*

24. Barry Ulanov described the West Texan: "Jack Teagarden, a big burly Texan with an infectious Panhandle accent in his singing, has always been associated with the blues. One of the few white men to attain distinction in the form, he lapses into the twelve-bar chorus of the blues as a matter of course" (*A History of Jazz in America* [New York: Viking Press, 1952], p. 33). See also Marshall W. Stearns, *The Story of Jazz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 106, 186, 189–190, and Leonard Feather, *The New Edition of the Encyclopedia of Jazz* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1960), pp. 438–439.

25. Jack Teagarden.

26. Ibid.

27. Stearns, *Story of Jazz,* p. 186; chap. 13, "Jack Teagarden and the Texas School," in Ross Russell, *Jazz Style in Kansas City and the Southwest* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 120–132.

28. In Dallas, September 25, 1935, Wills and Sleepy Johnson recorded four selections using just fiddle and guitar. In November, 1964, Wills made an album in Dallas, mainly of frontier fiddle music, and again used only stringed instruments (*Bob Wills Keepsake Album No. 1,* Longhorn LP-001). From the standpoint of folk music, one wishes he had cut more of these albums.

29. That record companies had difficulty in categorizing Wills's music is obvious from the descriptions on the labels of the following recordings: "Osage Stomp," Columbia 37701 (1935): "novelty hot dance"; "No Matter How She Done It," Vocalion 03537 (1936): "hot string band"; "She's Killing Me," Vocalion 03424 (1936): "old time"; "Bleeding Hearted Blues," Vocalion 03597 (1937): "hot string"; "Big Beaver," Columbia 20111 (1940): "novelty hot dance." The vast difference between "Osage Stomp" and "Big Beaver" is obvious; "Osage Stomp" is very close to the stomps of early jazz, while "Big Beaver" shows the influence of the big swing orchestras of the late 1930s and early forties.

30. "Strictly by Ear," *Time,* Feb. 11, 1946, pp. 48–49.

31. See the liner notes to *Louis "Satchmo" Armstrong,* Everest FS-258.

32. Between 1935 and World War II, Wills recorded at least 35 blues selections, more than 1 out of every 8 recordings. No fewer than 14 of the 200 records in that period were ragtime and stomp music, while at least 50 other selections can be identified as jazz or directly influenced by jazz. Thus at least 75 percent of his recordings between 1935 and 1942 were either jazz or greatly influenced by it. Nearly all the remaining 25 percent were performed in a dixieland or New Orleans jazz pattern. When I use the term *jazz* in reference to Wills's music, I mean New Orleans jazz, dixieland jazz, and the jazz idioms of swing, not modern or progressive jazz.

33. Sleepy Johnson; Johnnie Lee Wills; Kermit Whalin; June Whalin; Bob Wills; Edna Wills; Edna Wills, "What I Know"; Betty Wills; Joe Andrews. See also the liner notes by Strachwitz and Pinson to *Western Swing,* and Tony Russell, *Blacks, Whites and Blues* (New York: Stein and Day, 1970), pp. 85–88.

34. Bob Wills; Al Stricklin; O. W. Mayo; Joe Andrews; Wayne Johnson; Leon McAuliffe; Smokey Dacus.

35. Compare some of Rodgers's blues with those sung by Bessie Smith in the four-album *Bessie Smith Story,* Columbia CL-855, 856, 857, 858.

36. Both Wills's music and country music were, of course, influenced by the blues. However, country music, in general, has been primarily a stage music and has remained closer to folk, Appalachian, and rural styles. Because Wills's music was principally for dancing, it remained closer to the more traditional Negro blues and New Orleans jazz.

37. Johnnie Lee Wills; Bob Wills; Billy Jack Wills; Luke Wills; Ray DeGeer; Jamie McIntosh.

38. Bob Wills; Betty Wills; Glenn P. White; Bob Pinson; Glynn Duncan; Sleepy Johnson; Johnnie Lee Wills; Luke Wills; Edna Wills; Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* pp. 106–107. Both Bob and Betty Wills mentioned Emmett Miller as one of Wills's idols. Duncan told Bob Pinson that Miller was one of *his* idols (Pinson to me, Oct. 15, 1973). "I Ain't Got Nobody" was

copyrighted by Craig & Co. in 1916, credited to Roger Graham, Spencer Williams, and Dave Peyton. "Strangely enough," wrote Sigmund Spaeth, "the same song seems to have been written [in 1914] by David Young and Charles Warfield" (*A History of Popular Music in America* [New York: Random House, 1948], p. 398). See also James J. Fuld, *The Book of World-Famous Music: Classical, Popular and Folk,* rev. and enl. (New York: Crown Publishers, 1971), pp. 284–285. Wills recorded the song on September 23, 1935, and again on May 5, 1949.

39. Fortunately, twenty-four selections recorded by Wills and his Texas Playboys between 1935 and 1947 have been made available on *The Bob Wills Anthology,* Columbia KG 32416. Nineteen are reissues; five had not been previously issued. Since twenty-two of these sides were recorded between 1935 and 1941, they provide a good example of what Wills's music was like when he and his band thought it was at its best.

40. Every member of Wills's band interviewed mentioned the jazz idioms in his music, particularly the breaks or choruses.

41. Chase, *America's Music,* pp. 76–77; Sablosky, *American Music,* p. 42.

42. Lucy Leffingwell Cable Bikle, *George W. Cable: His Life and Letters* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928), pp. 127–128; Chase, *America's Music,* p. 456.

43. © 1912 without words by W. C. Handy; copyright renewed. Song version © 1913 by Theron C. Bennett; copyright renewed by W. C. Handy and Charles Norton, son of George Norton. His interests are assigned to Jerry Vogel Music Co., Inc., 121 West 45 Street, New York, N.Y. 10036. Sigmund Spaeth indicates the lyrics cited here were added by George A. Norton (*History,* p. 384).

44. Henry "Booker T." Glass, at age 92 still a member of Dejan's Olympic Brass Band in New Orleans, told me he knew many black jazz fiddlers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the early part of the twentieth century, he said, they began using the instrument less. Anderson Minor, another early New Orleans jazzman, agreed with Glass, as did Harold Dejan, who said some jazz fiddlers played even into the 1940s. Allan Jaffe, proprietor of New Orleans' Preservation Hall, said he had heard old-timers speak of many jazz fiddlers in Louisiana. In his talks with jazz artists he learned that jazz violinists were most popular in Texas. See especially George M. Foster, *Pops Foster: The Autobiography of a New Orleans Jazzman* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 20, 28, 46–47, 49, 53, 63, 75.

45. Jesse Ashlock; Johnny Gimble; Bob Wills; Keith Coleman. Listen especially to Jesse Ashlock (Ken Griffis interview).

46. Johnny Gimble. Also Smokey Dacus; Ray DeGeer; Wayne Johnson; Leon McAuliffe; Danny Alguire; Joe Holley; Alex Brashear; June Whalin; Kermit Whalin; Woodie Wood; Jack Lloyd; Eldon Shamblin. Johnny Gimble's skills and achievements were most recently recognized by the CMA, which in 1975 voted him Instrumentalist of the Year. He is the first fiddler ever to win that honor.

47. Woodie Wood, who for more than forty years played nothing but dixieland jazz, said Wills always used a "standard dixieland style," playing some melody, then improvised choruses, then back to the melody.

48. Bob Wills. Also Sleepy Johnson; Ray DeGeer; Woodie Wood; Alex Brashear; Joe Holley; Johnny Gimble; Keith Coleman; Wayne Johnson; Al Stricklin; Leon McAuliffe; Jack Lloyd; Kermit Whalin.

49. When Richard B. Allen was a guest in our home during the Christmas holidays, 1973, we listened for several hours to these old Wills 78s. Allen, who has interviewed many of the early New Orleans jazz figures, heard most of their records, and helped in recording sessions with many jazz pioneers, was struck by the similarities between Wills's style and that of the New Orleans jazzmen of the early twentieth century. During that visit he read and made helpful comments on the first seven chapters of this volume.

50. Unfortunately, Columbia never released "Liebestraum" or "La Paloma." Tapes of these masters are now at the John Edwards Memorial Foundation, UCLA, to which I am indebted for the opportunity of hearing these and other unreleased recordings. Bob Pinson of the Country Music Foundation Library and Media Center in Nashville has also made rare and unreleased Wills material available for this study.

51. "Oklahoma Hills," "El Rancho Grande," and "Silver on the Sage" are three of the Tiffany transcriptions Wills made in California in 1946 and 1947. I am indebted to Glenn P. White for making these rare transcriptions available to me.

52. Good illustrations are "Wang Wang Blues," Vocalion 03173 (1935); "I Ain't Got Nobody," Vocalion 03206 (1935); "Ten Years," Okeh 6692 (1942); "When It's Honey Suckle Time in the Valley," unissued Columbia master H 848 (1942); "Whose Heart Are You Breaking Now?," Okeh 6703 (1942); "Let's Ride with Bob," Okeh 6692 (1942).

53. Listen, e.g., to *Jim Robinson and His New Orleans Band,* Center CLP 8, on which this traditional jazz band played two selections Wills recorded in the 1930s, "Old Fashioned Love" and "Silver Bells."

54. All of Wills's musicians I interviewed, especially those who played with jazz bands either before or after they played in Bob's band, agreed with this conclusion. Woodie Wood; Alex Brashear; Smokey Dacus; Ray DeGeer; Wayne Johnson; Claude "Whoopy" McCray; Jamie McIntosh; Neil Duer; George Balay; Johnny Gimble; Bob Lee; Eldon Shamblin; Danny Alguire. See also "Okies Reverse Order of Steinbeck's Tale," *Metronome,* 57, no. 4 (Apr., 1941), 24.

55. Bill Bailey, e.g., in his liner notes to Bob Wills, *Time Changes Everything,* Kapp KD-3569, used the term *Bob Wills beat.* Such writers seem to be unaware that Wills's beat was merely that of dixieland. See also John McEuen's brochure notes to *Hall of Fame: Bob Wills and Tommy Duncan,* United Artists UAS-9962.

56. Smokey Dacus. Also George Balay; Woodie Wood; Al Stricklin; Ray DeGeer; Danny Alguire; Wayne Johnson; Alex Brashear.

57. Quoted in George T. Simon, *The Big Bands* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1967), p. 138. Refer also to Smokey Dacus; Woodie Wood; Neil Duer; George Balay; Darrell Jones.

58. Bob Wills. Also Danny Alguire; Alex Brashear.

59. Ray DeGeer, who played saxophone and clarinet for Bob Wills, Charlie Barnett, Gene Krupa, Red Nichols, and others, referred to Wills's music as "western jazz." DeGeer thought Wills was always closer to New Orleans dixieland than he was to swing. Though DeGeer probably overstated the case, when he was with Wills, in 1936–37, Wills's music was closer to the New Orleans style. By 1939, Wills had shifted to the more popular swing style. Listen, e.g., to Wills's 1940–42 recordings of "Big Beaver," "New San Antonio Rose," "New Maiden's Prayer," "Liebestraum," "La Paloma," "I Found a Dream," "My Confession," "This Little Rosary," "When It's Honey Suckle Time in the Valley," and "Let's Ride with Bob."

60. See the chapter entitled "Jazz, Mainstream and Modern" in William W. Austin, *Music in the 20th Century: From Debussy through Stravinsky* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1966), pp. 274–293. Even Louis Armstrong gave up his "small groups," his Hot Five and Hot Seven, to join in the swing and play a more popular music. Listen to *Louis Armstrong "Back in N.Y." Vol. 1 (1935),* Decca DL 79248.

61. See Sablosky, *American Music,* chap. 7, "Bridge to the Present," pp. 135–165.

62. Leon McAuliffe. Also Woodie Wood; George Balay; Sleepy Johnson; Herman Arnspiger; Smokey Dacus; Wayne Johnson; Glenn Rhees; Jack Lloyd; Al Stricklin; Kermit Whalin; June Whalin; Bob Wills; Joe Andrews; Ray DeGeer; Danny Alguire; Jamie McIntosh.

63. Billy Jack Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; Bob Wills; Luke Wills; Al Stricklin; Leon McAuliffe.

64. Leonard Bernstein, *What Is Jazz,* Columbia CL 919.

65. For a discussion of the term *western swing,* see chap. 14, n. 15.

6

Light Crust Doughboys and Texas Playboys

The Light Crust Doughboys are on the air.
Truett Kimzey

Bob, I'm going to kill that son-of-a-bitch
W. Lee O'Daniel if he does it again.
John Wills

A big break came for Bob Wills and his western swing (though no one had ever heard the term at the time) while he and his Aladdin Laddies were playing dances at Crystal Springs. The break did not exactly *come;* actually, Wills and his friends Ed Kemble and Truett Kimzey went after it. Wills feared the Aladdin Lamp show might be cancelled at any time, and even if it was not, another radio show would help business at the dances. Burrus Mill and Elevator Company was spending a good deal of money in the area advertising its product, Light Crust flour, and Ed Kemble decided to try to get Burrus Mill to sponsor a radio show featuring Wills and his band.[1] Kemble told some of the mill officials how much Wills's Saturday broadcast from the Kemble Brothers furniture store had helped his business and finally persuaded them to sponsor Wills on station KFJZ for a trial period of one month. Truett Kimzey, the only engineer KFJZ had at the time, may have had a more immediate influence on Burrus Mill's decision to experiment with the program.

The program first went on the air one morning in early January, 1931.[2] Truett Kimzey, who had never announced in his life, but wanted to help get the band a break, was to do the announcing. Bob Wills, violin in one hand and bow in the other, waited nervously, hoping that that show would start him on the road to musical success. Herman Arnspiger waited patiently to show Fort Worthers his skill as a guitarist, and Milton Brown was ready to sing. Kimzey got the studio signal to start the show; he introduced the band to an unsuspecting audience, and Brown began singing a prisoner's song called "Twenty-one Years."[3] Then Fort Worth's champion fiddle band, Wills and Arnspiger, played an old tune called

"Chicken Reel." Kimzey read a commercial written by the president and general manager of Burrus Mill, Wilbert Lee O'Daniel, and the band played on. This was the unpretentious beginning of what later became one of the most popular radio shows in the history of the medium in the Southwest, a show that survived the Depression and World War II and did not go off the air until television brought its end nearly a quarter of a century after it began.[4]

Wills, Herman Arnspiger, and Milton Brown were the only members of the band who consistently played the broadcasts.[5] Their shows originated each morning in the "main studio" of KFJZ, located in the back of Meacham's Store; the station's transmitter was on a telephone pole at the edge of Fort Worth and had a range of about fifteen miles. During the first broadcast, Wills, probably with little thought and perhaps flippantly, referred to his band as the Light Crust Doughboys.[6] Kimzey began to use that name, and it became permanent. The officials at Burrus Mill and Elevator Company also liked the catchy expression. Most of all they were impressed with the large amount of mail that came to KFJZ within the next few days approving the Light Crust Doughboys—but not sufficiently impressed to pay Wills and his band any salary. Wills, though, felt the exposure would bring more people to his dances, and it was at least a beginning.

It is unlikely W. Lee O'Daniel had much to do with the arrangements for the first broadcasts of the Light Crust Doughboys.[7] He probably wrote all the commercials for the first shows and sent them to Kimzey, who read them on the broadcasts. Other than this, O'Daniel remained completely aloof from the show. It is doubtful the future governor and United States senator had ever heard Wills and his band before. When he did, he did not like what he heard. Two weeks after the Light Crust Doughboys began broadcasting, O'Daniel, according to Durwood Brown, fired the whole band and canceled the show because he "didn't like their hillbilly music."[8]

KFJZ continued the program without a sponsor because of the quantity of favorable mail they were receiving. Bob decided to confront O'Daniel himself. He wanted the security of a show sponsored by a big corporation. Too many people were unemployed, and playing dances still seemed an uncertain source of income. Bob sat in O'Daniel's outer office for two or three days, but was not permitted to see him. When Bob finally was allowed to go in, O'Daniel sat at his desk and shifted papers for several minutes before asking in a contemptuous manner, "What did you want to talk to me about?" Bob told him he wanted a job. "I'll drive a truck, sweep the floor, or anything. But I want a job." O'Daniel, typically skeptical of musicians, answered, "It's out of the ordinary for a musician to want to work, isn't it?"[9] When Wills assured the skeptic he really meant what he said, O'Daniel responded, "Well, that puts a different light on it if you're

sure you want to work." He then agreed to sponsor the program again and pay each member of the band $7.50 a week. To get this, however, Wills had to agree that each man would work forty hours a week at the mill. Wills drove a truck, sometimes as much as a hundred miles a day. Even worse, Arnspiger was put on the "bull gang." They worked "eight hours a day at the mill," he recalled. "The first day I helped load twelve carloads of flour." Milton Brown had the softest job. Since he had been a salesman, he was put in promotion and sales work. Arnspiger was, of course, the first to complain: "We had to get up in time for a 7:00 A.M. broadcast and then work all day at the mill. Our hands were so sore and stiff you couldn't note a guitar or play a fiddle."[10] Herman advised Bob, "O'Daniel is getting his music for nothing. We earn our pay at the mill. He can put me one place or the other. I will play the broadcasts or work at the mill, but not both." Arnspiger's rebellion helped end the work at the mill after the first five or six weeks. But even after they quit working there officially, they were required to stay at the mill eight hours a day and practice for the broadcasts.[11]

Their broadcasts were an overnight success. Milton Brown and Wills worked out a theme song that they sang to the tune of "Eagle Riding Papa from Tennessee"; it included these lines:

> Oh, we never do brag, we never do boast.
> We sing our song from coast to coast.
> We're the Light Crust Doughboys from Burrus Mills.[12]

This was a rather presumptuous theme song for a group which was known only in West and North Central Texas and which sang over a station that did not reach all the way to Dallas. It was more a forecast of the future than a present reality. The show still did not even warrant a regular announcer; Truett Kimzey, the station engineer, continued to emcee.[13] However, he had a way of introducing the show that the listeners liked. After a couple of licks on the fiddle or guitar, Kimzey announced in a very enthusiastic voice, "The Light Crust Doughboys are on the air." That was the cue for their theme song and the opening of the show. They followed it with a wide variety of music[14]—no doubt one reason the band had such a broad appeal. They offered fiddle tunes, blues, jazz, and ballads. Above all, they played dance music. According to one early member of the Doughboys, they performed "strictly popular music. Whatever was popular, we played."[15] Bob Wills gave it all his own interpretation and stamped it with his own distinctive style. O'Daniel recognized that their popularity was gaining customers for Light Crust flour and raised them to fifteen dollars a week the second month they broadcast.[16]

O'Daniel still, however, remained aloof from the Doughboy broadcast and what he erroneously called their "hillbilly music." Determined to get him interested in what they were trying to do, the Doughboys sent him a

special invitation to attend the broadcast. One day he finally went, and Wills got him to say a few words on the air as president of the company that sponsored them. From that day on, W. Lee O'Daniel was the greatest fan the Doughboys had. He went out of his way to be friendly with the boys in the band. He began to write continuity for the shows. He bought an expensive automobile, painted it elaborately with signs and slogans about Light Crust flour and the Light Crust Doughboys, and equipped it with the latest public address system.[17]

The Doughboys became ambassadors of goodwill for Burrus Mill and, though neither they nor the mill knew it at the time, for W. Lee O'Daniel. At first the Doughboys went to nearby towns and played for special occasions.[18] Then O'Daniel began to appear on the program. At least by November, 1931, and probably much earlier, he was a regular on the show and had taken over the announcing chores. O'Daniel had a flair for dramatization and publicity. He wrote poems and read them on the air and often had the band work out music for them. Though his songs never became known beyond the area covered by the radio show, they were popular throughout the Southwest. O'Daniel recorded most of them later for Columbia. They include "Beautiful Texas," "Put Me in Your Pocket," "Your Own Sweet Darling Wife," and "I Want Somebody to Cry over Me." O'Daniel had the uncanny ability to write timely songs. For example, when the famous blues singer Jimmie Rodgers died, he wrote "Memories of Jimmie Rodgers," and he composed a song for Franklin D. Roosevelt's war on the Depression, "On to Victory, Mr. Roosevelt." On the lighter side, he wrote a song for an influenza epidemic, the chorus of which had the words "Kachoo! Kachoo! Kachoo!"[19]

W. Lee O'Daniel not only wrote special songs for special occasions, he often put together entire programs for these occasions. On November 11, 1931, for instance, he produced the "Light Crust Doughboys Armistice Program."[20] He even bought evening time over station WACO in Waco for this special. After the theme song, the Doughboys played and sang "Over There," and O'Daniel made some patriotic remarks about "those noble Texas housewives, who 13 years ago—on bended knees—gave thanks to Almighty God for the greatest event of this generation—the signing of the Armistice." It is interesting that the tribute was to Texas housewives, who bought flour, rather than to the war veterans. Then the Doughboys burst forth with a patriotic tune, "Don't Bite the Hand That's Feeding You," followed by O'Daniel's reading of the John McCrea poem "In Flanders Fields." Although O'Daniel claimed he made no mention of their product on such a solemn broadcast, he dedicated a Doughboy song to a disabled veteran who was the representative of Burrus Mill in "the El Paso territory." O'Daniel read "The Fight of the Lost Battalion" to the background of "Home Sweet Home," and then the Doughboys did "Break the News to

Mother." After other patriotic songs and poems, the Doughboys sang "God Be with You 'til We Meet Again," and O'Daniel gave a closing prayer.The Doughboys' regular broadcasts had to be *good* to survive O'Daniel's special programs.

Not content with just broadcasting, O'Daniel had the whole show—songs, poems, and continuity—published in pamphlet form to be sent free to those requesting it.[21] The Doughboys and O'Daniel autographed the pamphlets before they were mailed. A year later he did nearly the same show but that year mailed the pamphlets with a Christmas greeting from the Doughboys stapled on the front.[22]

Early in 1932, Wills and the Doughboys made some records for Victor. There had been a personnel change by that time: Arnspiger was gone. Sleepy Johnson, who took his place, said O'Daniel fired him "for getting married," while Ruth Sheldon wrote that Wills fired him because he had gotten prosperous and consequently careless with his playing.[23] In any event, Johnson, who had been playing banjo with the band at Crystal Springs, was the third member of the Doughboys playing guitar. Durwood Brown, who also played with Wills at dances, played guitar in that recording session. Wills played fiddle; Milton Brown handled the vocals. They recorded two sides for Victor on February 9, 1932, in the Jefferson Hotel in Dallas, "Sunbonnet Sue" and "Nancy Jane." It was a simple fiddle band recording, but this rare disc reveals that Wills already had his dance beat and the music had his characteristic swing. For some reason, probably Burrus Mill policy, the record was released as by the Fort Worth Doughboys.[24] Recording—or at least present—that same day with these unknown Doughboys were Jimmie Davis, another unknown, and the famous blues singer Jimmie Rodgers.[25] This record was not a hit; it was the only one Wills ever made while he was with the Light Crust Doughboys and the only one he ever made for Victor. Actually, a field man for Victor had sought Wills and the band out and asked them to make the recording. As in the case of the first jazz record, Victor was not afraid to make one of the first recordings of western music.

After the initial weeks of the broadcast, O'Daniel moved the show from KFJZ to the prime time of 12:30 noon on WBAP. In about six months, he was broadcasting over WOAI in San Antonio and KPRC in Houston. Shortly afterward, the shows were aired over the Southwest Quality Network, which included KTAT in Fort Worth and KOMA in Oklahoma City.[26] O'Daniel and Burrus Mill were quick to follow up. They chartered a bus to Galveston for the bakers' convention, planned a schedule of stops at key dealers and distributors, and announced on their programs where the Light Crust Doughboys could be seen "free and in person." In Waco and elsewhere, hundreds, and on a few occasions thousands, came to see them.[27]

The Doughboys' radio show became one of the most popular in all the

Southwest.[28] One visitor at WBAP expressed the opinion that their show was the most popular program in the state of Michigan.[29] This claim was probably exaggerated. The fact that the visitor would even suggest it, however, shows that the program's popularity in Michigan must have been quite widespread. Closer to home, there was no question about it. When the show was being carried over KPRC in Houston in 1932, Leon McAuliffe, though only in his mid-teens, was already making a career in music and was therefore sensitive to the popularity of various kinds of music. "The people of Houston had never heard anything like it," he said. "There was no western music there at the time." McAuliffe remembered walking to the store for his mother during the Doughboys' noon broadcast: "I would walk three blocks to the store and never miss a word of a song. In the summer every window was open, and every radio was tuned to the Light Crust Doughboys."[30]

By mid-1932, O'Daniel had made even greater plans for the Doughboys. He built them a studio at the mill and furnished it with the latest phonographs and recordings.[31] They were expected to spend eight hours a day there either rehearsing or learning new material. This was good for Bob Wills, since he did not know too many selections, and "it took him a month to learn a new one," as Sleepy Johnson remarked. Wills learned many of the popular dance selections he later used in Tulsa in the Burrus Mill studio. The Doughboys did not mind the eight hours of practice each day; nor did they mind the special engagements that took their time but never gave them extra pay. But when O'Daniel raised them to twenty-five dollars a week and said they must stop playing dances, they revolted. Wills complained, but he had moved his father and his family to Fort Worth and was afraid to quit. Milton Brown refused, claiming he could not make a living without the additional income; on September 7, 1932, he resigned and left the band.[32] This was not the only reason Brown left. Both he and Wills wanted to run the band, and the band belonged to Wills. There was a good deal of professional jealousy between them, though they remained the best of friends until Brown's death.[33] Brown was bolder and wiser than Wills on that occasion. After all, each man often made forty dollars in a single night at Crystal Springs, and O'Daniel paid them only twenty-five dollars for a whole week. Brown took his brother Durwood from Wills's band to play rhythm guitar; he added Jesse Ashlock on fiddle, Ocie Stockard on banjo, and Wanna Coffman on bass. Milton did all his own vocals. A few weeks later he added Fred "Papa" Calhoun on piano.[34] He began broadcasting over KTAT as Milton Brown and his Musical Brownies. He continued with the same style he had learned from Wills and developed one of the most successful dance bands in the Southwest. Before his death, in 1936, he had recorded more than one hundred selections and had helped to make western swing popular.

Brown did very well playing dances at Crystal Springs and continually

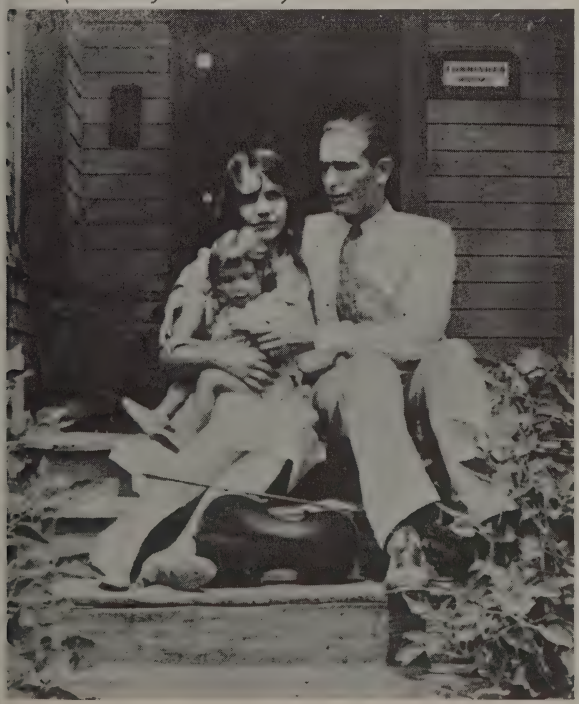
encouraged Bob to leave O'Daniel and go back to playing dances also.[35] Bob still preferred the security of Burrus Mill and began looking for a vocalist to replace Brown. He tried several, but none pleased him. A vocalist for Wills had to be able to sing everything from blues to the latest popular songs, plus the traditional jazz, novelty, and cowboy songs.[36] Finally, on September 21, after Bob had auditioned sixty-seven singers, he found his man, a young fellow from Whitney named Thomas Elmer Duncan.[37] Like so many other musicians, Duncan was out of work and had been for weeks. He had been playing a little cheap guitar that was "about a foot and a half long" and singing at the Ace High root beer stand in Fort Worth for just his tips.[38] Wills listened to him nearly all night, then asked if he could sing "I Ain't Got Nobody." Duncan replied he could; the song was a favorite of his. "If you can sing it the way I have in mind it should be sung, you've got a job."[39] Tommy obviously sang it to Wills's satisfaction. The next morning Wills told Sleepy Johnson he wanted him to hear the new vocalist. Johnson recognized him as the boy from the root beer stand and said, "My goodness, we don't want that boy," but admitted he sounded much better with the band and without "that little guitar." Wills instructed, "Tommy, the first thing is get rid of that guitar."[40] He then hired Kermit Whalin[41] to play steel guitar and bass. He wanted to hire Arnspiger again to play guitar, but O'Daniel would not agree to it. Wills took him on anyway. Though the mill did pay Arnspiger a small salary, it was not enough for him to live on, and Bob had to supplement it out of his own wages.

Ever since O'Daniel ordered the band to quit playing dances and Milton and Durwood Brown left the group, a rift developed between Wills and O'Daniel. Milton Brown had done very well broadcasting over KTAT and playing dances. He was making more money in one night at Crystal Springs than Wills made at Burrus Mill all week, and Wills knew it.[42] He deeply resented the fact that O'Daniel's arbitrary decision was costing him dollars he desperately needed. Bob Wills had never had any economic security in his entire life, and he evidently thought he had it with Burrus Mill. Actually, he and the band were still playing dances, but they managed to keep O'Daniel from learning about it. They played regularly at Hillsboro, Whitney, and other towns. Usually they had to play outside Fort Worth and were thus denied the good money they once made at Crystal Springs and other places in the city. Nevertheless, Wills preferred to play fewer dances, clandestinely, if he could only hold on to the security of Burrus Mill.[43] Above all, he did not want to confront O'Daniel on the matter and perhaps lose his job and the radio show. The argument over rehiring Arnspiger made the rift between Wills and O'Daniel even worse, and the fact that Bob had gotten drunk and missed some broadcasts probably did as much to widen it as anything.[44]

Edna and Jim Bob Wills and their daughter, Robbie Jo, in Turkey, Texas, in January, 1929. *(Courtesy Edna Wills)*

Jim Bob Wills and his daughter Robbie Jo in Turkey, Texas, in January, 1929. *(Courtesy Edna Wills)*

Robbie Jo, Edna, and Bob Wills in Fort Worth, 1930 or 1931. *(Courtesy Edna Wills)*



Bob Wills and his daughter Robbie Jo in Fort Worth, 1930. *(Courtesy Edna Wills)*

The Wills Fiddle Band, 1930. *Left to right:* Herman Arnspiger, Bob Wills. *(Courtesy Edna Wills)*

The Wills Fiddle Band in Fort Worth, 1930 or 1931. *Left to right:* Herman Arnspiger, Bob Wills, Robbie Jo Wills. *(Courtesy Edna Wills)*

Finalists in a Fort Worth fiddlers' contest, 1930. On the photograph is written: "The biggest fiddle band that ever played at one time. We all played 'Turkey in the Straw.' This picture was taken at night on Houston Street, Ft. Worth, Texas." The Wills Fiddle Band consisted of Bob Wills (first row, second from right) and Herman Arnspiger (guitarist behind Wills). Note Wills's mustache. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

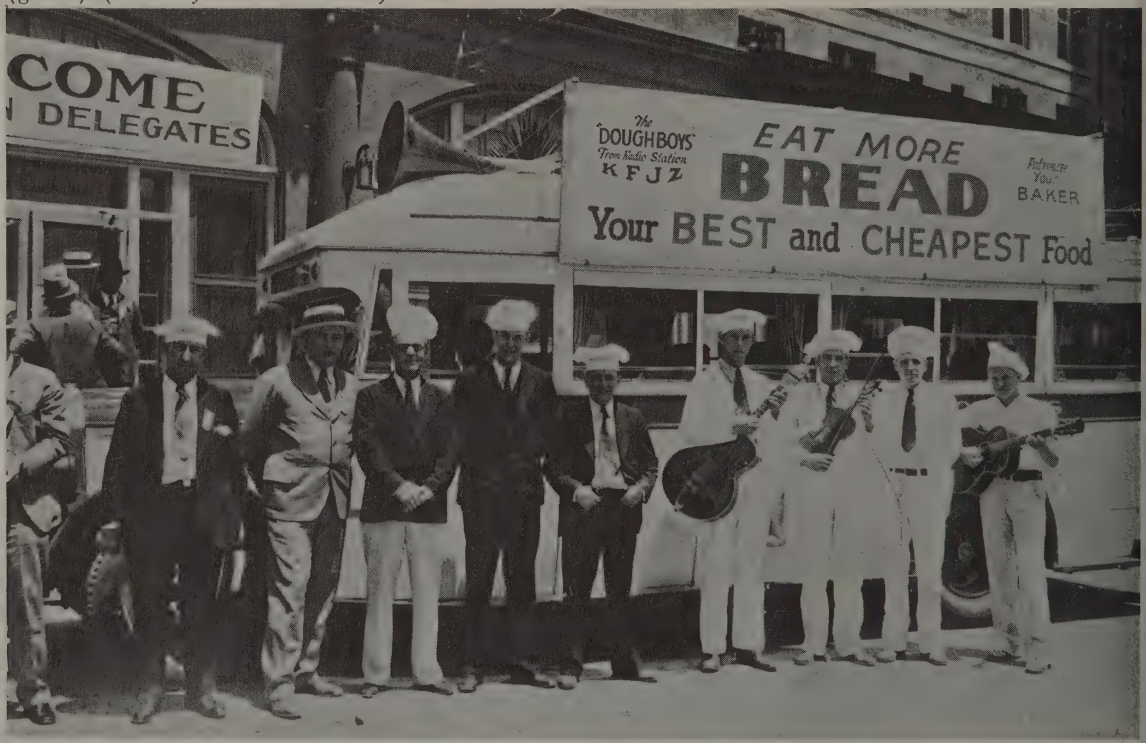
The original Light Crust Doughboys, 1931. *Left to right:* Bob Wills (fiddle), Truett Kimzey (announcer), Milton Brown (vocals), Herman Arnspiger (guitar). *(Courtesy Edna Wills)*

The Light Crust Doughboys broadcasting, 1931. *Left to right:* Milton Brown (vocals), Durwood Brown (guitar), Truett Kimzey (announcer), Bob Wills (fiddle), Herman Arnspiger (guitar). *(Courtesy Durwood Brown)*

PROSPERITY SPECIAL
Light Crust DOUGHBOYS Each Morning 7:00 to 7:30 K-F-J-Z
Patronize Texas Industry & Texas Agriculture AND PROSPERITY WILL RETURN
Use LIGHT CRUST FLOUR A TEXAS PRODUCT
On Everything You Buy SPECIFY Made In Texas
BURRUS MILL & ELEVATOR CO. Ft. WORTH TEXAS.

The Light Crust Doughboys, original group, 1931. *Left to right:* Herman Arnspiger (guitar), Bob Wills (fiddle), Milton Brown (vocals), Truett Kimzey, unidentified official of Burrus Mill, W. Lee O'Daniel. *(Courtesy Herman Arnspiger)*

The Light Crust Doughboys at a bakers' convention in Galveston, Texas, in 1931. *Left to right:* two unidentified officials of Burrus Mill, W. Lee O'Daniel, unidentified Burrus Mill official, Truett Kimzey, unidentified Burrus Mill official, Herman Arnspiger (guitar), Bob Wills (fiddle), Milton Brown (vocals), Durwood Brown (guitar). *(Courtesy Durwood Brown)*



The Light Crust Doughboys at a Fort Worth zoo for a chimpanzee's birthday party, 1933. *Left to right:* Herman Arnspiger (guitar), Bob Wills (fiddle), W. Lee O'Daniel, unidentified zoo official with chimpanzee, Tommy Duncan (guitar and vocals), Sleepy Johnson (guitar). *(Courtesy Sleepy Johnson)*

The Light Crust Doughboys, 1933. *Left to right:* W. Lee O'Daniel, Bob Wills (fiddle), Herman Arnspiger (guitar), Tommy Duncan (guitar and vocals), Sleepy Johnson (tenor banjo), unidentified bus driver. *(Courtesy Sleepy Johnson)*

LIGHT CRUST DOUGHBOYS
ARMISTICE PROGRAM
STATION W-A-C-O
NOV. 11, 1931
7:00-7:30 PM

(Station Announcer)

We are now pleased to present for your entertainment those popular LIGHT CRUST DOUGHBOYS, and their sponsor and guest announcer, W. Lee O'Daniel, President and General Manager of the Burrus Mill & Elevator Company.

(W. Lee O'Daniel) Here they are, folks.

(LIGHT CRUST DOUGHBOYS) THEME SONG

Now listen everybody from near and far
If you want to know who we are
We're the LIGHT CRUST DOUGHBOYS
From the BURRUS MILL.

If you like the way we play,
Listen while we try to say
We're the LIGHT CRUST DOUGHBOYS
From the BURRUS MILL.

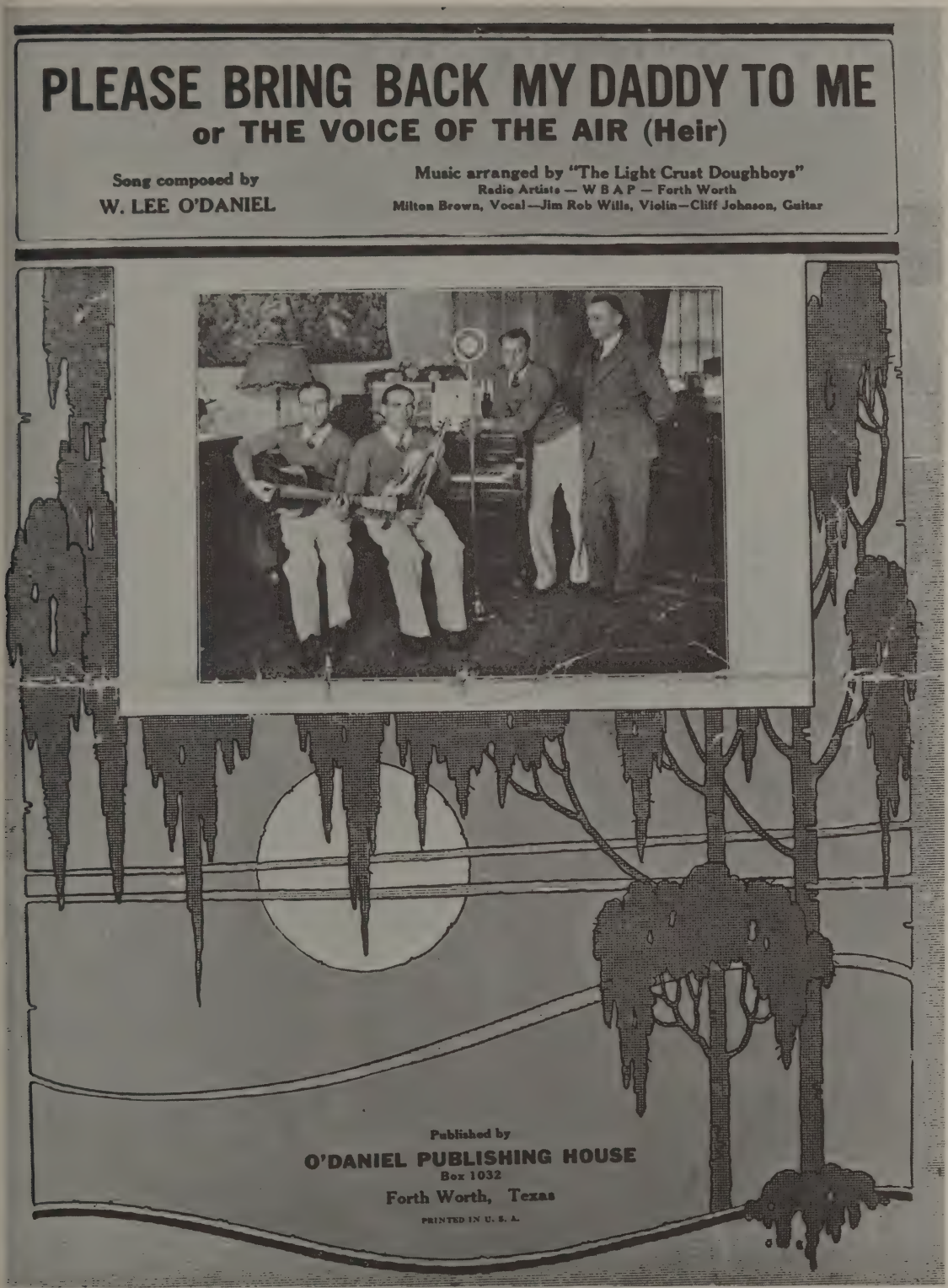
And all night long
We're going to play this song
And if you get this song
You can't go wrong.

We'll make you broke, we'll make you tight
We'll make you happy from morn 'till night.
We're the LIGHT CRUST DOUGHBOYS
From the BURRUS MILL.

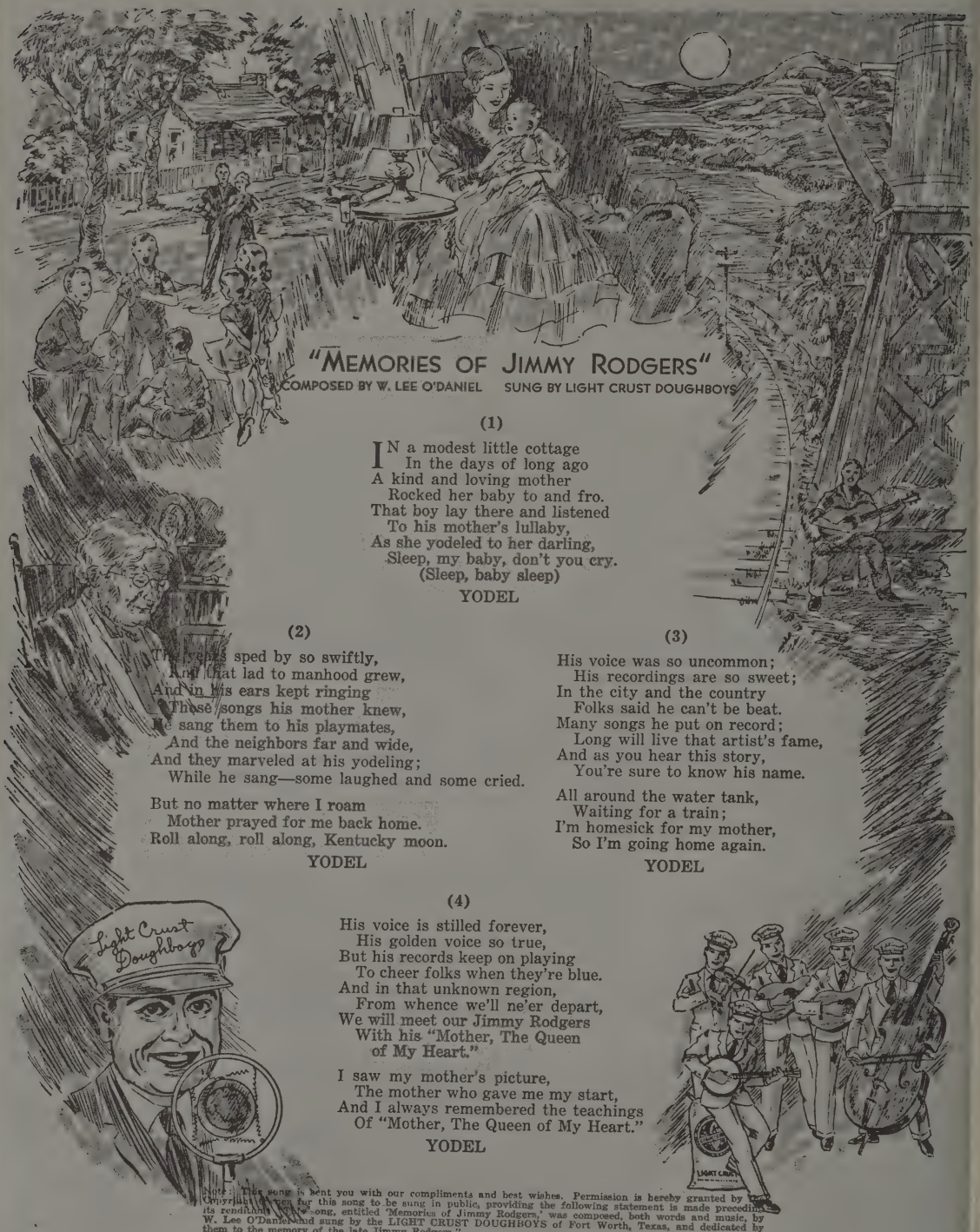
Over there, Over there,
Over there, Over there, Over there,
The Yanks are coming, the Yanks are coming,
The drums are rum-tumming everywhere.
Over there, Over there, Over there,
Now tell them, say your prayers,
We're coming over, we're coming over
And we won't be back
'Till it's over, Over there.

Goodbye Broadway, Hello France,
We've ten million strong,
Goodbye sweethearts, wives and mothers,
It won't take us long.
Just be happy while we're gone
It's for you we're fighting too,
Goodbye Broadway, Hello France,
We've come to square our debts with you.

Portion of the Light Crust Doughboys Armistice Program, 1931. *(Courtesy Herman Arnspiger)*


PLEASE BRING BACK MY DADDY TO ME
or THE VOICE OF THE AIR (Heir)
Song composed by
W. LEE O'DANIEL
Music arranged by "The Light Crust Doughboys"
Radio Artists — W B A P — Forth Worth
Milton Brown, Vocal—Jim Rob Wills, Violin—Cliff Johnson, Guitar
Published by
O'DANIEL PUBLISHING HOUSE
Box 1032
Forth Worth, Texas
PRINTED IN U. S. A.

Front cover of sheet music to W. Lee O'Daniel's "Please Bring Back My Daddy to Me," copyrighted March 26, 1932. *(Courtesy Edna Wills)*



"MEMORIES OF JIMMY RODGERS"

COMPOSED BY W. LEE O'DANIEL SUNG BY LIGHT CRUST DOUGHBOYS

(1)

IN a modest little cottage
In the days of long ago
A kind and loving mother
Rocked her baby to and fro.
That boy lay there and listened
To his mother's lullaby,
As she yodeled to her darling,
Sleep, my baby, don't you cry.
(Sleep, baby sleep)

YODEL

(2)

The years sped by so swiftly,
And that lad to manhood grew,
And in his ears kept ringing
Those songs his mother knew,
He sang them to his playmates,
And the neighbors far and wide,
And they marveled at his yodeling;
While he sang—some laughed and some cried.

But no matter where I roam
Mother prayed for me back home.
Roll along, roll along, Kentucky moon.

YODEL

(3)

His voice was so uncommon;
His recordings are so sweet;
In the city and the country
Folks said he can't be beat.
Many songs he put on record;
Long will live that artist's fame,
And as you hear this story,
You're sure to know his name.

All around the water tank,
Waiting for a train;
I'm homesick for my mother,
So I'm going home again.

YODEL

(4)

His voice is stilled forever,
His golden voice so true,
But his records keep on playing
To cheer folks when they're blue.
And in that unknown region,
From whence we'll ne'er depart,
We will meet our Jimmy Rodgers
With his "Mother, The Queen
of My Heart."

I saw my mother's picture,
The mother who gave me my start,
And I always remembered the teachings
Of "Mother, The Queen of My Heart."

YODEL

Note: This song is sent you with our compliments and best wishes. Permission is hereby granted by the Copyright [illegible] for this song to be sung in public, providing the following statement is made preceding its rendition: "The song, entitled 'Memories of Jimmy Rodgers,' was composed, both words and music, by W. Lee O'Daniel and sung by the LIGHT CRUST DOUGHBOYS of Fort Worth, Texas, and dedicated by them to the memory of the late Jimmy Rodgers."

Tune in on the Light Crust Doughboys WBAP, KPRC, WOAI 12:30 Noon Daily; KOMA 7 P. M. Daily; WBAP 10 P. M. Monday, Wednesday, Friday

An O'Daniel broadside, copyrighted March 15, 1934. *(Courtesy Edna Wills)*

Bob's younger brother, Johnnie Lee, had taken a job with the mill as a truck driver at a salary of twelve dollars a week. When Johnnie Lee and his foreman had a disagreement, Bob asked O'Daniel to intervene in behalf of his brother. O'Daniel refused. Childishly, Bob lost his temper and asked that both he and Johnnie Lee be fired. Instead, O'Daniel raised Bob's salary to thirty-eight dollars a week. Furthermore, he told Bob he wanted him to build the best band in the country: "If it takes seventeen men to do it right, hire them." The first thing Bob did was put Johnnie Lee into the band. Again, O'Daniel refused. Bob acted with more maturity that time, accepted O'Daniel's decision, and took Johnnie Lee out of the band.[45]

Much more was involved in Wills's job with O'Daniel than just his own career and livelihood. The Depression had wiped his father out completely. John Wills had given up his farm, lost all he had invested in it, and moved to Plainview, Texas, in 1931.[46] Things were even worse there. Nearly all of the nine children were still living at home. "There were times when there was not even any salt in the house," one of them said. "I mean it—there was not even any salt to put on the food if we had had any."[47] Jobs were not to be had. John Wills often took his fiddle and with one of the older girls to second on the guitar "played on street corners, in pool halls and domino parlors," or any other place where he could get tips. Only their music kept the family out of the soup lines. Those were the leanest years of their lives. When Bob Wills learned just how bad their "hubbin' it" really was, he moved them to Fort Worth. When they first arrived, they stayed at the rooming house where Bob and his wife were living. The landlady said she did not know how Bob managed his own rent and his father's, too, "but he always paid his bills."[48]

O'Daniel owned a farm near Fort Worth and insisted that John Wills and his family live on it. The elder Wills did not like O'Daniel, but agreed to move to his farm anyway because he could raise a good deal of his own food there for his large family. Wills had not unloaded his possessions before he and O'Daniel were at loggerheads. There was mutual disrespect between the two of them. O'Daniel evidently thought Wills was a worthless ne'er-do-well, and, according to John Wills, talked to him as if he were a peasant. John had little except his pride, and such treatment robbed him of that. O'Daniel went to the farm nearly every day and took part of the milk, cream, butter, and eggs—interesting, considering that less than eight years later O'Daniel won the governorship of Texas campaigning on a platform that promised to do something for the "old folks and poor people." The longer the elder Wills knew O'Daniel, the more deeply he disliked and distrusted him. He told Bob explicitly what he was going to do if O'Daniel came to the farm again and talked to him as if he were a peon: "Bob, I'm going to kill that son-of-a-bitch W. Lee O'Daniel if he does it again."[49] A few days later, O'Daniel drove up to the farm and "jumped on to Papa." While

Wills unhitched the mules from the wagon, O'Daniel berated him. As John unhooked the trace chains, he pulled the pin and slipped the singletree out. The singletree was a little over three feet long, was made of bois d'arc or oak, and had a steel hook on each end to which a chain could be attached. O'Daniel saw Wills coming at him from around the mules with the singletree and ran for his car. He just managed to get away as John Wills ran up to his car wielding the singletree.[50] Texans did not know how close they came to losing a future governor and United States senator that day.

This encounter not only ended the stay of the John Wills family on O'Daniel's farm, it also widened the rift between Bob Wills and O'Daniel. Yet it was not the incidents at the farm, O'Daniel's ruling that the Doughboys could not play dances, or the disagreement over the hiring and firing of band members that caused Wills to leave the Light Crust Doughboys. Wills's only enemy, drinking, was the principal reason he was fired.[51] At various times in the nearly three years he worked for O'Daniel, Wills had gotten drunk and missed broadcasts. This had not happened often, but each time it left O'Daniel in a critical situation. He had to try to do a broadcast without a fiddle player and the leader of the band. O'Daniel warned him: "One more time, Bob, you fire yourself." On another occasion Wills was drinking too heavily and wrecked a car the company had provided for him.

O'Daniel was more than fair regarding Wills's drinking and probably should have fired him before he did. In fact, he had already fired Wills once. That night, after they had gone to bed, Bob told Edna he was going to "get up and go talk with Mr. O'Daniel." They went to O'Daniel's home, and O'Daniel agreed to give Bob another chance.[52] The repeal of Prohibition and the legalization of alcoholic beverages in Fort Worth were no help to Wills. In late August, 1933, he failed to appear for a broadcast. O'Daniel tried to persuade Johnnie Lee and others to go get Bob at a tavern where he had been most of the night before and the morning of the broadcast.[53] When Wills did not show up, he was replaced by a very good fiddler from Kentucky, Clifford Gross. Though Wills could not believe it in those lean days of the Depression, this probably was best for him. He would probably have achieved very little had he remained with O'Daniel, who had business and political ability but virtually no musical talent or imagination.

At least some of the Doughboys felt that was the case, because half the band decided to leave with Wills. The day after he was fired Bob went by the studio to get his things and found O'Daniel telling the boys how they would have to carry on without him. Tommy Duncan caught Wills: "Where do we go from here?" "What do you mean?" Wills asked. Duncan answered, "You hired me, O'Daniel didn't. And I'm not leavin' you until

you do fire me. Anywhere you go I'm goin'."[54] Duncan meant what he said—he stayed with Wills for the next fifteen years. Kermit Whalin left with Wills also. Arnspiger and Johnson decided to stay with O'Daniel. O'Daniel lectured Wills on the futility of taking these musicians from the security of their jobs with a million-dollar corporation during a depression. Had it not been for O'Daniel's actions over the next few years, one could believe he actually had the boys' well-being at heart. "You're making the worst mistake in your life Bob. You are taking these boys from a job where they make money . . . with you where they probably won't make a dime. This will go down in history against you, Bob," he warned. "O'Daniel," Wills replied, "it may go down in history, but it won't go down against me! I'm not takin' these boys. . . . They're leavin' a million dollar concern to go with a guy like me who you say 'ain't got nothin.' . . . I've got somethin' to be proud of and those boys will get a break because I'll kill myself workin' to see that they do!"[55] Wills had the last word on that August day in 1933, but that was not to be his last encounter with W. Lee O'Daniel.

Wills was reluctant to leave the Light Crust Doughboys and Fort Worth. He had not made much money there, but he was providing for his wife and daughter and helping his father and his family. He had made a lot of friends in the area and, of course, did not wish to leave them. His experiences in Fort Worth had given him confidence in himself and his ability to make a career in music. Since arriving there in 1929, he had organized a successful band, performed in minstrel shows, appeared on three radio stations, and built a profitable dance circuit. Though he did not know it at the time, he had also launched an important movement in the history of American popular music. Milton Brown, whom he started in show business, was gaining acclaim with his Musical Brownies and in the next few years would become a successful recording artist for Victor and Decca.[56] Within the next two decades many others would organize western bands in the Fort Worth area and the Southwest, and nearly all of them followed, in one way or another, the patterns established by Wills.[57] The Light Crust Doughboys, which he originated, went on to even greater success. They had one of the most popular radio shows in the Southwest for the next twenty years, made over two hundred records, and, like most of the western bands in that area, maintained much of the musical style Wills set in the beginning. Between 1929 and 1933 Bob Wills made Fort Worth the cradle of western swing and western jazz.[58]

He was also out of a job. Besides the usual obligations that go with having a family, the fact that Tommy Duncan and Kermit Whalin insisted on going with Wills put pressure on him to find a place for a band in a hurry. Perhaps because he had played over the local radio station and had friends in Waco, he thought of going there. He called Everett Stover,

manager of station WACO, who agreed to put him on the 12:30 noon spot, the same time the Doughboys would be broadcasting. It was a sustaining show: the station furnished the time, and Wills furnished the talent. The program was available for sale, but until they got a sponsor, Wills and the band would not be paid. He had heard that story many times and would hear it again. Nevertheless, he believed the radio publicity would enable them to make plenty of money playing dances. He would need it—he had to borrow twenty-five dollars to even get the band to Waco. Shortly after they began broadcasting, Jones Fine Bread became the sponsor of the show.[59]

It was during the broadcasts on WACO that Wills first called his band the Playboys.[60] This was a term that was used rather loosely during the Jazz Age and one that would appeal to young people in a college town like Waco. The boys in the band were also young, all in their early or mid-twenties except Wills, who was twenty-eight, and they dressed like the average university student. They wore none of the cowboy attire that was later one of their trademarks, but rather dress pants and royal blue pullover sweaters with a musical emblem, in gold, on the front.[61] Playboys was a good name for them. Their music was still largely popular dance music, with a bit more jazzy improvisation on the steel guitar, since the bass, tenor banjo, and piano could carry the rhythm. The *original* Playboys were Bob Wills on fiddle; Tommy Duncan, piano and vocals; Kermit Whalin, steel guitar and bass; Johnnie Lee Wills, tenor banjo; and June Whalin, rhythm guitar. Wills had to start all over, building a reputation for the Playboys as he had for the Doughboys. But in less than ten years, the Playboys would become the largest and most famous western band in the history of American music.

Bill Little, the Waco fireman who had lent Wills the money to get his band to Waco, was of great help in getting them a foothold in Central Texas.[62] Little had met Wills while Wills was still with the Light Crust Doughboys. They had played a special broadcast in Waco, and the firemen at Little's station prepared dinner for them. Though it was against fire department regulations, Little began trying to book dances there. He got the Playboys an invitation to play at the clubhouse for the firemen and their wives. Though they received only a good meal for their effort, they were before the public, and there was always the possibility it might lead to other jobs. At that dance Wills also met a man who would prove very important to the development of his career, O. W. Mayo, Little's brother-in-law.[63]

The next week, Little rented Woodmen Hall in downtown Waco for a dance. The following advertisement appeared in a Waco paper on September 20:

DANCE

Tonight
W.O.W. Hall
Bob Wills' Fiddle Band
(Formerly Light Crust Dough-
boys)—9 Till ?
Per Couple .....75¢
Extra Ladies .....10¢[64]

A good crowd attended, but about 10:00 P.M. the police shut the dance down because Little had forgotten to obtain a three-dollar dance permit. The customers agreed to take rainchecks and left. O. W. Mayo had gone to the dance also, more out of curiosity than anything else. He was interested in seeing how well the man he had met at the Fireman's Clubhouse would do in a more commercial situation. Mayo was impressed, not so much by the music as by how hard the band worked despite the almost unbearable heat in the corner where they were playing. "I decided to try to help the boys get started in Waco. I told Bob and the boys that I had lived there for several years, knew the area, and might be able to book them some engagements." Mayo knew nothing about booking a dance band. He had worked for City Service Oil Company for nearly a decade and before that worked for a railroad. At the time, he was considering moving to Amarillo to take a position with the Phillips Petroleum Company. He had until November to make a decision.[65]

A day or so after the dance at Woodmen Hall, Mayo and his wife went to Cameron, where he rented a dance hall for five dollars for the coming Saturday night. On the way home, they stopped to visit Mrs. Mayo's relatives in Sharp. Mayo arranged for Wills and his Playboys to play a show at the Sharp school on Saturday afternoon before the dance in Cameron on Saturday night. Wills and the band were to get 75 percent of the gate. Mayo returned to Waco and had two sets of window cards printed, giving information about either the show or the dance. On the cards he identified Bob Wills and his Playboys as "formerly the Light Crust Doughboys" (a note that soon led to trouble).[66] On Saturday they tied Kermit's bass fiddle across the top of Mayo's 1932 four-door Plymouth (Wills and the band owned no cars) and drove to Sharp for the show at the school. They charged ten cents admission and took in forty dollars. That night they played the dance in Cameron. "We charged women ten cents, men fifty cents. Get the women and you can get the men to a dance," Mayo observed. "After we took out five dollars for rent on the hall and five dollars for my car, paid for the window cards and rent on a public address system, we made $27.50 or $28.50 apiece, I can't remember which—more than Tommy and Kermit made in a whole week for O'Daniel."[67]

The future began to look a little brighter. "The boys bought new strings for their instruments and had their clothes cleaned," Mayo remembered. "We began to get mail to play either schools or dances at Rosebud, Buckholts, Rogers, Temple, Belton, Hillsboro, and other places."[68] They played for dances throughout Central Texas. Shortly after Wills arrived in Waco, he started appearing at the Green Terrace at Lake Waco.[69] This was a break, for the Green Terrace was spacious, and crowds were large enough there to justify such name performers as Duke Ellington and his orchestra.[70] On October 1 the Green Terrace advertised a "battle dance" for Monday, October 2, featuring "Bob Wills and His Playboys of Station WACO and Milton Brown & His Musical Brownies of Station KTAT." The advertisement also assured the dancers the most for their money in that depression year by adding that the dance would be from "9 until Exhausted—Admission $1 Couple."[71] In addition to dances and shows, Wills and his Playboys played civic clubs and, even more important financially, the largest theaters in Waco. In the latter part of September they performed at a downtown theater, and, according to one source, were advertised as follows:

> EXTRA ADDED ATTRACTION
> BOB WILLS AND HIS LIGHT CRUST DOUGHBOYS
> In Connection with Modernistic Beauty Revue,
> Waco Theatre, September 22nd, 1933.[72]

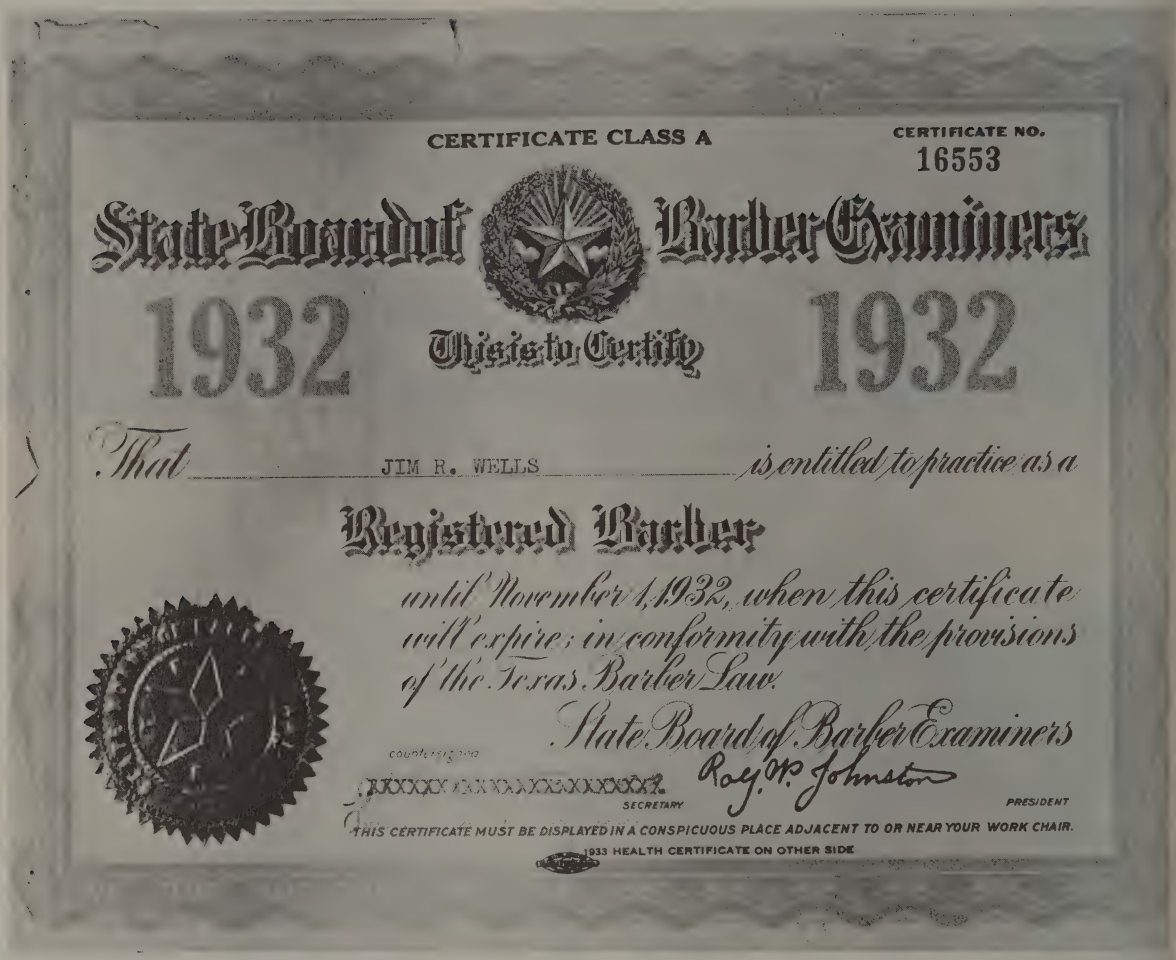
Mayo was busy every day booking dates and handling advertising and details for engagements. Though he had little business experience, he was doing well for the Playboys and appeared to be what they needed. When Mayo received a letter from the Phillips Petroleum Company telling him to report to Amarillo, Wills talked him out of going and hired him as his manager. This was one of the wisest moves Wills ever made. Mayo remained Bob's manager until World War II broke up the band.[73]

Things had never looked so good for Bob Wills. But early in October, 1933, a little over six weeks after he left Fort Worth, he was served with papers naming him a defendant in a $10,000 damage suit filed by Burrus Mill and Elevator Company. Burrus Mill claimed damages because Wills had advertised that the members of his band were formerly with the Light Crust Doughboys. It also asked the court for the "immediate issuance of a temporary injunction restraining [Wills] and each of them from advertising or using the name Light Crust Doughboys or formerly the Light Crust Doughboys."[74] The district court issued a temporary restraining order on October 7, 1933, the day the suit was filed.

What O'Daniel, Burrus Mill, and their lawyers had to do was prove that Wills's use of the phrase "formerly Light Crust Doughboys" was damaging to their firm and to the sale of Light Crust flour and that it was

John Wills on the O'Daniel farm, 1932 or 1933. *(Courtesy Edna Wills)*

On the O'Daniel farm near Fort Worth, 1932 or 1933. *Left to right:* John Wills, Bob Wills, Johnnie Lee Wills, Elton Alley. *(Courtesy Edna Wills)*


CERTIFICATE CLASS A

CERTIFICATE NO. 16553

State Board of Barber Examiners

1932 This is to Certify 1932

That JIM R. WELLS is entitled to practice as a

Registered Barber

until November 1, 1932, when this certificate will expire; in conformity with the provisions of the Texas Barber Law.

State Board of Barber Examiners

countersigned

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

SECRETARY

Roy W. Johnston

PRESIDENT

THIS CERTIFICATE MUST BE DISPLAYED IN A CONSPICUOUS PLACE ADJACENT TO OR NEAR YOUR WORK CHAIR.

1933 HEALTH CERTIFICATE ON OTHER SIDE

Wills's barber's license, 1932. Note that his name is entered "Jim R. Wells." *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

Bob Wills and his Playboys, the original group, in Waco, Texas, 1933. *Left to right:* Everett Stover (announcer), June Whalin (guitar), Kermit Whalin (bass), Bob Wills (fiddle), Johnnie Lee Wills (tenor banjo), Tommy Duncan (guitar and vocals). *(Courtesy Edna Wills)*

Milton Brown's Musical Brownies. *Left to right:* Henry Cunningham, Sam Cunningham, Milton Brown, Durwood Brown, Jesse Ashlock, Ocie Stockard, Wanna Coffman. *(Courtesy Edna Wills)*

Bob Wills and his Playboys, the original group, 1933. *Left to right:* June Whalin, Kermit Whalin, Bob Wills, Johnnie Lee Wills, Tommy Duncan, Everett Stover. *(Photo by Stauts' Studio, Waco; courtesy June and Kermit Whalin)*

Bob Wills and his Playboys, late 1933, shortly before they left Waco for Oklahoma. *Left to right:* O. W. Mayo (manager), June Whalin (guitar), Son Lansford (bass), Kermit Whalin (fiddle), Don Ivey (piano), Bob Wills (fiddle), Johnnie Lee Wills (tenor banjo), Tommy Duncan (guitar), Everett Stover (announcer). *(Photo by Stauts' Studio, Waco; courtesy Ruby Wills Sullivan)*

illegal. If they achieved this, they could get their injunction, and Wills would probably be liable for the alleged $10,000 damages.[75] At least this was O'Daniel's strategy. He was out to destroy Bob Wills and his Playboys, and he spared no expense trying to get the injunction and win his case.[76] He showed up for the hearing with a retinue of the best lawyers he could hire in the Fort Worth–Dallas area and even hired Frank E. and Jake Tirey, two of the finest lawyers in Waco. Wills employed Vernon Goodall and Harold J. Stafford, just out of Baylor University Law School, as defense attorneys.[77] O'Daniel and Burrus Mill argued that the "said defendants [Jim Rob Wills, Thomas Elmer Duncan, and Kermit Whalin] began a course of wrongful, willful, unfair, malicious and deceptive use of the form of advertisement used by the plaintiff, and each of them, began giving joint entertainment for hire in various and sundry places . . . under the name Light Crust Doughboys. . . ." O'Daniel's lawyers presented a mass of evidence from circulars, placards, and newspapers in an effort to prove that the defendants were guilty of such advertisements and that this was damaging to Burrus Mill and Elevator Company in general and to the sale of Light Crust flour in particular. O'Daniel's attorneys argued that Wills's use of the name Light Crust Doughboys was especially damaging to Burrus Mill because this "had led the public to believe that it was sponsoring or approving public dances and had injured it in various other ways, to its damage in the sum of $10,000." In short, they alleged that the defendants were trying to "injure the appellant and deceive the public."[78] Bob could not understand why Burrus Mill would sue them for $10,000 when O'Daniel knew there was not forty dollars among all of them. Bob was worried about how he would handle such an amount if he lost the case. "I was talking to the old judge," he recalled, "and I said, 'My fiddle is about the only thing he'll get.' The judge said, 'You don't worry, my boy. He won't get your fiddle.' "[79]

District Judge Sam R. Scott ruled that since Burrus Mill admitted that Wills, Duncan, and Whalin had "worked for them," there was nothing damaging in advertising the true fact that they were "formerly the Light Crust Doughboys." The court found there were no grounds for injunctive relief and dismissed the Burrus Mill and Elevator Company writ of injunction. Furthermore, the court ruled that "the temporary restraining order granted herein in chambers on October 7, 1933, be dissolved."[80] O'Daniel had lost the first round.

O'Daniel and Burrus Mill appealed their case to the Tenth Court of Civil Appeals.[81] As it turned out, this suit became a landmark case in Texas law because this particular kind of case was new to Texas courts.[82] The court based its decision, in part, on two similar cases in the state of New York. On June 13, 1935, the decision of the lower court was affirmed, thus establishing a precedent in Texas law.[83] Still not satisfied, O'Daniel had his

lawyers petition the Tenth Court of Civil Appeals for a rehearing. On September 19, 1935, the court denied the motion for rehearing, and the case was finally closed.[84]

O. W. Mayo, who was with Wills through this whole affair, said, "O'Daniel was the guy. He wanted Bob back because he realized after Bob left that nobody could take Bob Wills' place on the show. They didn't have the popularity and pull."[85] Pull and popularity were about all Wills had left when the court fight with O'Daniel was over. He certainly did not have any money left. He could not pay his lawyer's fee of $200 and in fact had to pay it off in installments of twenty-five dollars per month after he got established in Tulsa, making the final payment on May 25, 1935.[86] Throughout the traumatic lawsuit, Wills at least managed to keep his sense of humor. After he left the Doughboy broadcast, people began to complain that they missed his hollering. O'Daniel therefore got someone to holler once in a while, to give the show the "Wills effect." After the decision was announced in his favor in the district court, Bob jested to his lawyer, "O'Daniel sued me for stealing a name. Now I'm going to sue him for stealing my holler."[87]

Bob Wills defeated O'Daniel in every round in Waco, but neither Wills nor Texas had heard the last of W. Lee O'Daniel.

1. Bob Wills; Durwood Brown; Herman Arnspiger; Sleepy Johnson; Gene Hames; Buster Brown; Mary Helen Brown; Edna Wills; Kermit Whalin; June Whalin; Johnnie Lee Wills. Truett Kimzey, engineer and announcer for the earliest Light Crust Doughboys broadcasts, said that Will Ed Kemble's furniture store did a great deal to promote the Wills Fiddle Band. Truett Kimzey was interviewed by C. L. Douglas and Frances Miller in "The Life Story of W. Lee O'Daniel—A Saga of American Success," *Fort Worth Press,* Aug. 17, 1938.

2. The exact date of the first broadcast is not known. Evidently not even W. Lee O'Daniel knew for certain, for in 1933, when he filed a lawsuit against Wills, his lawyers said the broadcasts began "about January 1st 1931." This date, the only one I have found regarding the first broadcast, is used several times in the legal papers regarding this suit. See Legal Papers and Correspondence of Vernon Goodall and Harold Stafford. See especially Notes on Interview with Bob Wills, Thomas Elmer Duncan and Kermit Whalen [*sic*], with Goodall and Stafford, 1933 (cited hereafter as Interview with Wills, Duncan, and Whalin), in which Wills also said the broadcasts began "about January 1, 1931." Because this interview was made so early, and includes many dates, salary schedules, and other material on Wills's years with the Doughboys and relations with O'Daniel, it proved an invaluable source.

3. It was Truett Kimzey who recalled that their first song was "Twenty-one Years." See Douglas and Miller, "Life Story"; Ruth Sheldon, *Hubbin' It: The Life of Bob Wills* (Tulsa: Privately published, 1938), p. 101. For a brief account of Wills's years in Fort Worth, see Robert Shelton and Burt Goldblatt, *The Country Music Story: A Picture History of Country and Western Music* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1966), pp. 172–175. Nearly all of Wills's musicians have items relating to this era, regardless of when they played in his bands. See especially Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook; Herman Arnspiger Scrapbook; Durwood Brown Scrapbook; Sleepy Johnson Scrapbook; Al Stricklin Scrapbook; Kermit Whalin Scrapbook; June Whalin Scrapbook; Edna Wills Scrapbook; Robbie Wills Calhoun Scrapbook; O. W. Mayo Scrapbook.

4. Marvin Montgomery was very helpful concerning the Light Crust Doughboys. He was a member of the band from the mid-thirties until it stopped broadcasting in the fifties. Now

a composer and part owner of a very successful recording studio in Dallas, he is well read in the history of western music and jazz. There is still a Light Crust Doughboy band; Burrus Mill gets Montgomery and others together once a year for a reunion and to play at the Texas state fair in Dallas. See also Tony Russell's interview with Knocky Parker, "Knockin': Western Jazz Age Reviewed by Veteran Parker," *Old Time Music,* No. 11 (Winter, 1973–74), pp. 13–16.

5. Douglas and Miller, "Life Story"; Roy Lee Brown to Glenn P. White, Dec. 31, 1961. Durwood Brown played dances and occasional broadcasts with the band. But Wills, Arnspiger, and Milton Brown were the "original" Light Crust Doughboys. The literature on the Light Crust Doughboys is almost nonexistent; the best discussion concerning the origin of the band, plus a discography, is Bob Healy, "The Light Crust Doughboys," *Folk Style,* No. 9 (n.d.), pp. 5–14. See also Healy, "The Light Crust Doughboys," *Country Directory,* No. 3 (1962), pp. 21–30. Listen especially to Edna Wills; Edna Wills, "What I Know"; Bob Wills; Herman Arnspiger; Durwood Brown; Sleepy Johnson; Kermit Whalin; June Whalin; Johnnie Lee Wills.

6. Sheldon wrote that Wills used this expression at Crystal Springs, where she said the first broadcast for Burrus Mill originated (*Hubbin' It,* p. 101). I was able to interview every living member of the original Doughboy band, as well as all the other members who played in the Doughboy band with Bob, and not one remembered broadcasting from Crystal Springs for the mill.

7. There is no adequate study of O'Daniel beyond a scholarly monograph on his political career by Seth Shepard McKay, who agrees that the future governor had little to do with the first broadcast of the Doughboys (*W. Lee O'Daniel and Texas Politics 1938–1942* [Lubbock: Texas Tech Press, 1944], p. 23). The best account of O'Daniel's life during the years Wills was with him is a sketch, as told by himself to Sam Acheson, which ran in the *Dallas Morning News* for six days beginning August 14, 1938. See also June Welch, "The Fort Worth That Was—The Sound of the Cowbell," *Fort Worth Press,* Sept. 27, 1971.

8. Durwood Brown. See also Interview with Wills, Duncan, and Whalin; Edna Wills; Bob Wills; Edna Wills Scrapbook; June Whalin; Kermit Whalin.

9. Quoted in Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* pp. 102–103; Bob Wills. According to Interview with Wills, Duncan, and Whalin, Will Ed Kemble had a great deal to do with persuading O'Daniel to resume the broadcast. Also Durwood Brown; Herman Arnspiger; June Whalin; Kermit Whalin.

10. Herman Arnspiger; Edna Wills, "What I Know"; Edna Wills Scrapbook; Edna Wills; Bob Wills.

11. Bob Wills; Sleepy Johnson; Johnnie Lee Wills; Herman Arnspiger; Durwood Brown; Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook; Durwood Brown Scrapbook; Herman Arnspiger Scrapbook; Edna Wills Scrapbook; Interview with Wills, Duncan, and Whalin.

12. Healy, "Light Crust Doughboys," *Country Directory,* and "Light Crust Doughboys," *Folk Style,* p. 5; Sleepy Johnson; Herman Arnspiger; Bob Wills.

13. Durwood Brown; Bob Wills; June Whalin; Sleepy Johnson; Herman Arnspiger Scrapbook; Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook; Kermit Whalin Scrapbook.

14. Durwood Brown; Bob Wills; Edna Wills; Edna Wills Scrapbook; Edna Wills, "What I Know"; Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook.

15. Durwood Brown. Also Sleepy Johnson; June Whalin; Kermit Whalin.

16. Bob Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; Herman Arnspiger; Sleepy Johnson; James "Doc" Eastwood to Glenn P. White, Aug. 17, 1962; Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* p. 103; Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook; Durwood Brown Scrapbook; Interview with Wills, Duncan, and Whalin.

17. Herman Arnspiger; Durwood Brown; Johnnie Lee Wills; June Whalin; Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* pp. 104–105; Edna Wills; Edna Wills Scrapbook.

18. Wills's band apparently grew in popularity and exposure when O'Daniel got interested in it. In 1932 the Doughboys and the Fort Worth Ladies Band provided entertainment for an important program in Fort Worth, with O'Daniel as master of ceremonies. The band also played in musical programs at the Berry Street Baptist Church and at other churches in the city. Bob Wills; Edna Wills; Herman Arnspiger; Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook; Edna Wills Scrapbook; Robbie Wills Calhoun Scrapbook.

19. Bob Wills; Herman Arnspiger; Sleepy Johnson; Edna Wills; Mary Helen Brown; Gene Hames; Durwood Brown; Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook; Herman Arnspiger Scrapbook; Kermit Whalin Scrapbook; Edna Wills Scrapbook. "Beautiful Texas" was known beyond the Southwest and was recorded by other artists.

20. I am indebted to Herman Arnspiger for allowing me to borrow his copy of the script for the "Light Crust Doughboys Armistice Program," which is autographed by himself, Wills, Milton Brown, and W. Lee O'Daniel.

21. Ibid.

22. Arnspiger also allowed me to use his copy of the "Light Crust Doughboys Armistice Program" for November 10, 1932. It was aired from 7:00 to 7:30 P.M.

23. Sleepy Johnson; Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* p. 105; Stephen F. Davis and Keith Titterington, " 'Sleepy' Johnson: Western Swing Pioneer," *Old Time Music,* No. 7 (Winter 1972–73), pp. 8–11; Edna Wills; Edna Wills Scrapbook; Bob Wills.

24. Both Sleepy Johnson and Durwood Brown, who were at this recording session, believed the name change was due to Burrus Mill policy. Wills told me this was definitely the reason for using the name Fort Worth Doughboys.

25. Bob Healy, Bob Pinson, and Glenn P. White, "Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys: A Bio-Discography." *Record Research,* No. 79 (Oct., 1966), p. 3; Sleepy Johnson; Bob Wills; Durwood Brown. Since the *Record Research* bio-discography was prepared, however, Pinson gained access to ledger sheets for the session, which do not indicate that Davis and Rodgers recorded that day in Dallas. Johnson and Brown remembered meeting them at that time, and Wills told me that was "the only time I ever saw Jimmie Rodgers." Wills and Rodgers were two of the earliest and most abiding influences on country music; they and Davis were later elected to the Country Music Hall of Fame.

26. Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* p. 105; Bob Wills; Johnny Bond; Leon McAuliffe.

27. Herman Arnspiger; Sleepy Johnson; Durwood Brown; Bob Wills; Joe Andrews.

28. According to news items in Fort Worth newspapers, usually headed "WBAP Static," W. Lee O'Daniel and his Doughboys received two thousand pieces of mail in response to one broadcast. See Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook.

29. News item from a Fort Worth paper, headed "Studio Static." Many photographs and news items in the Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook show the tremendous crowds the band drew on its tours. See also Herman Arnspiger Scrapbook; Durwood Brown Scrapbook; Kermit Whalin Scrapbook; Edna Wills Scrapbook.

30. Leon McAuliffe. Also Johnny Bond; Joe Andrews; Othel Stubb; Dewitt Huffines; Lawrence Hedrick.

31. Sleepy Johnson; Kermit Whalin; June Whalin; Herman Arnspiger; Edna Wills; Robbie Wills Calhoun; Edna Wills Scrapbook; Edna Wills, "What I Know"; Kermit Whalin Scrapbook.

32. Durwood Brown; Herman Arnspiger; Interview with Wills, Duncan, and Whalin.

33. Sleepy Johnson; Herman Arnspiger; Bob Wills; Durwood Brown; Edna Wills; Mary Helen Brown; Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* pp. 105–106.

34. Durwood Brown; Edna Wills; Bob Wills; June Whalin; Kermit Whalin; Durwood Brown Scrapbook; Edna Wills Scrapbook; Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook; Bob Pinson, "The Musical Brownies," *Country Directory,* No. 4 (n.d.), pp. 13–19 (includes a complete discography); Philip Fortune, "What the Old Time Western Bands Consisted Of," *Disc Collector,* No. 12 (n.d.), p. 11. Milton Brown later added Bob Dunn, a fine jazz musician, on steel guitar (Bob Dunn to Glenn P. White, June 25, 1962). See also James "Doc" Eastwood to Glenn P. White, Aug. 17, 1962; Jesse Ashlock; Ken Griffis, "The Jesse Ashlock Story," *JEMF Quarterly,* 8 (Autumn, 1972), 122–123; Keith Kolby, "Milton Brown and His Musical Brownies," *Country Music Reporter,* 5, no. 1 (Jan., 1974), 12–15.

35. Durwood Brown. See Roy Lee Brown to Glenn P. White, Dec. 5, 31, 1961, Jan. 18, May 4, 1962.

36. Bob Wills.

37. Though I talked with Tommy Duncan often before his death in 1967, I never asked him many questions that should have been asked. His sister, Corine Andrews, and her husband, Joe Andrews, were very helpful. The best discussion of Tommy Duncan is on a

tape Ken Griffis made with his brother in 1970; listen to Glynn Duncan. Tommy Duncan evidently went broke on a farm he had leased at Hedley in West Texas. W. P. Doherty of Hedley remembered that Duncan sang Jimmie Rodgers songs as he drove along in an "old stripped-down car." Also Claude Spivey.

38. Sleepy Johnson; Sally Johnson; June Whalin; Kermit Whalin; Joe Andrews; Corine Andrews.

39. Quoted in Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* p. 107; Bob Wills; Edna Wills; Edna Wills, "What I Know"; Edna Wills Scrapbook; Betty Wills.

40. Sleepy Johnson; Glynn Duncan; W. P. Doherty; Claude Spivey; Roy Lee Brown to Glenn P. White, Dec. 31, 1961.

41. Incorrectly spelled "Whalen" by Miss Sheldon in *Hubbin' It* and by many other writers, including myself (up to the time of my interviews with the Whalins).

42. Durwood Brown; Sleepy Johnson; Bob Wills; Herman Arnspiger; June Whalin; Kermit Whalin.

43. Herman Arnspiger; Sleepy Johnson; Johnnie Lee Wills; Durwood Brown; Joe Andrews; Corine Andrews.

44. Bob Wills; Edna Wills, "What I Know." My interview with Edna Wills was especially valuable on this point.

45. Johnnie Lee Wills; Sleepy Johnson; Herman Arnspiger; Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* pp. 108–109.

46. Ruby Wills Sullivan; Lorene Wills Burton; Eloise Wills House; Johnnie Lee Wills; Luke Wills; Billy Jack Wills; Bobby Taylor; Lerlene Stout.

47. Bobby Taylor. Also Lorene Wills Burton; Eloise Wills House; Lerlene Stout.

48. Jennie McKenzie. Mrs. McKenzie, a distant relative of Emmaline Wills, was very helpful concerning Wills's years in Fort Worth. Edna Wills said they did much better financially after Bob went to work for O'Daniel and Burrus Mill.

49. Johnnie Lee Wills, field notes; Bob Wills; Edna Wills; June Whalin; Kermit Whalin; Edna Wills Scrapbook; Robbie Wills Calhoun Scrapbook; Kermit Whalin Scrapbook; June Whalin Scrapbook.

50. Johnnie Lee Wills; Bob Wills.

51. Kermit Whalin; Johnnie Lee Wills; Sleepy Johnson; Leon McAuliffe; Herman Arnspiger; Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* p. 111. See also Healy, "Light Crust Doughboys," *Folk Style,* pp. 5–6. All evidence indicates that O'Daniel gave Bob several warnings before he had to replace him.

52. Edna Wills; Edna Wills, "What I Know"; Bob Wills; Sleepy Johnson; Leon McAuliffe; Interview with Wills, Duncan, and Whalin; Edna Wills Scrapbook; Robbie Wills Calhoun Scrapbook.

53. Johnnie Lee Wills.

54. Quoted in Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* p. 112.

55. Ibid., pp. 112–116.

56. Pinson gives a complete discography in "Musical Brownies," *Country Directory.* After Milton Brown's death in 1936, Durwood Brown carried on with his Musical Brownies. In the 1940s, Roy Lee Brown, Milton's youngest brother, organized his own Musical Brownies. See also Bob Pinson, "The Musical Brownies," *Old Time Music,* No. 1 (Summer, 1971), pp. 14–16.

57. See Brad McCuen, "Bill Boyd and His Cowboy Ramblers on Record," *Country Directory,* No. 3 (n.d.), pp. 15–20, and "Jim Boyd and His Men of the West on Records," ibid., pp. 20–21; Bob Healy, "Oce Stockard and the Wanderers," *Disc Collector,* No. 18 (May, 1961), pp. 19–20; Fred G. Hoeptner, " 'Country' or 'Western'—It's a Choice of Words," *Country and Western Jamboree,* 4, no. 1 (Summer, 1958), 36–38; Glenn P. White and Bob Healy, "The San Antonio Story: The Tune Wranglers," *Record Research,* No. 69 (July, 1965), pp. 4–5; Buddy Ray to Glenn P. White, June 16, 1968. For examples of Wills's influence on western swing in Fort Worth and the Southwest, listen to *Western Swing,* Old Timey LP-105; the liner notes by Chris Strachwitz and Bob Pinson are very helpful. See especially Willie Nelson, "A Tribute to Bob Wills," *Country Music,* 2, no. 12 (Aug., 1974), 68–73; Jerry Zolten, "Western Swingtime Music: A Cool Breeze in the American Desert,"

Sing Out!, 23, no. 2 (May–June, 1974), 2–5; Bill C. Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.: A Fifty-Year History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), pp. 145–183.

58. Healy, "Light Crust Doughboys," *Folk Style,* "Light Crust Doughboys," *Country Directory,* and "W. Lee O'Daniel and His Hillbilly Boys," ibid., No. 4 (n.d.), pp. 8–13; Malone, *Country Music,* pp. 173–178. Welch, "The Fort Worth That Was," relates Wills and the Light Crust Doughboys to the history of Fort Worth during the Depression. Also June Whalin; Kermit Whalin; Herman Arnspiger; Sleepy Johnson; Marvin Montgomery.

59. George O. Jones, owner of the company that made Jones Fine Bread, told me that he sponsored Wills's broadcast during his entire tenure on station WACO and that the program was very successful, especially from a sponsor's point of view. Byron Lowry, an engineer at WACO at the time Wills's broadcasts began, also said the Playboy show was successful, "a byword" in the Waco area. Also Joe Andrews; Corine Andrews; Sleepy Johnson; Herman Arnspiger; Johnnie Lee Wills; Kermit Whalin; June Whalin; Bob Wills; O. W. Mayo; Vernon Goodall; Robert E. Weathers. Weathers, general manager of WACO, was very helpful; he made the archives of WACO available for this study.

60. Wills probably began broadcasting over WACO the end of August, 1933. The WACO program schedule listed "The Playboys" for a 12:15–12:30 P.M. show (*Waco Sunday Tribune-Herald,* Aug. 27, 1933). On September 7, "Bob Wills and His Playboys" played for dancing at the Green Terrace, Lake Waco (*Waco Tribune-Herald,* Sept. 7, 1933). See Edna Wills, "What I Know"; O. W. Mayo; June Whalin; Kermit Whalin; Bob Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; Edna Wills Scrapbook; Robbie Wills Calhoun Scrapbook; June Whalin Scrapbook; Kermit Whalin Scrapbook.

61. The sweaters were manufactured by the W. A. Holt Company, Athletic Outfitters, Waco. I am indebted to June Whalin for presenting me with his sweater.

62. Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* pp. 117–118; Edna Wills; Edna Wills, "What I Know"; O. W. Mayo; Vernon Goodall.

63. O. W. Mayo; Bob Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; June Whalin; Kermit Whalin.

64. *Waco Times-Herald,* Sept. 20, 1933. See also the advertisement for another Wills dance in the *Waco News-Tribune,* Sept. 19, 1933.

65. O. W. Mayo; Bob Wills.

66. Bob Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; Edna Wills, "What I Know"; June Whalin; Kermit Whalin; Edna Wills Scrapbook; Robbie Wills Calhoun Scrapbook; Kermit Whalin Scrapbook.

67. O. W. Mayo. See the salary schedule in Interview with Wills, Duncan, and Whalin.

68. O. W. Mayo; Kermit Whalin; Bob Wills; Vernon Goodall; Johnnie Lee Wills; June Whalin.

69. June Whalin; Son Lansford. See the advertisement for this appearance in the *Waco Tribune-Herald,* Sept. 7, 1933.

70. Son Lansford; Bob Wills; June Whalin; O. W. Mayo; Johnnie Lee Wills; Kermit Whalin. An advertisement for the Duke Ellington dance appeared in the *Waco Tribune-Herald,* Sept. 22, 1933.

71. See the Green Terrace advertisement for this appearance in the *Waco Sunday Tribune-Herald,* Oct. 1, 1933. Also Robert E. Weathers; Mrs. Benny Green; Bob Wills; O. W. Mayo; Kermit Whalin; Son Lansford.

72. Attorneys for W. Lee O'Daniel, arguing that this advertisement (the source of which they did not identify) was used in connection with this theater appearance, included it as evidence that Wills used the Doughboy name after he was fired by Burrus Mill. O. W. Mayo admitted using the phrase "formerly the Light Crust Doughboys," but said they never advertised they *were* the Light Crust Doughboys as the advertisement quoted indicates. I found no advertisements in which Wills referred to his band as "his Light Crust Doughboys." See the original petition in the suit filed by Burrus Mill and Elevator Company against Jim Rob Wills and others, No. 32483 in the District Court, Nineteenth Judicial District, McLennan County, State of Texas, Oct. 7, 1933. See also Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* p. 120; advertisements for Wills's dances in the *Waco News-Tribune,* Sept. 19, 1933, and *Waco Times-Herald,* Sept. 20, 1933; Edna Wills; Edna Wills, "What I Know."

73. O. W. Mayo; Bob Wills; Edna Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills.

74. Writ of Injunction No. 32483, *Burrus Mill & Elevator Company v. Jim Rob Wills et al.* (original in Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook).

75. Vernon Goodall.

76. O. W. Mayo; June Whalin; Kermit Whalin; Bob Wills.

77. Goodall to me, Mar. 20, 1973. Vernon Goodall was very helpful in this aspect of Wills's career. With Bob and Betty Wills's permission, he turned over his complete file on *Burrus Mill & Elevator Company v. Jim Rob Wills et al.* to me for this study. He also granted me interviews and helped me locate people in central Texas who knew Wills during his stay in Waco.

78. These statements are in the legal papers Goodall made available to me (in documents actually presented to the court or statements by the court). See also *Burrus Mill & Elevator Company v. Wills et al.*, 85 S.W. 2d 851 (1935).

79. Bob Wills.

80. Decision written by Judge Scott, Nov. 1, 1933, No. 32483, *Burrus Mill & Elevator Company v. Jim Rob Wills et al.*

81. Bob Wills to Harold Stafford, Feb. 17, 1934; Vernon Goodall to O. W. Mayo, Nov. 22, 1934, Jan. 10, May 21, 28, June 17, 1935.

82. Vernon Goodall. The legal papers of Goodall and Stafford include the complete text of the decision of the appeals court. See No. 1565 in the Court of Civil Appeals for the Tenth Supreme Court Judicial District of Texas, *Burrus Mill & Elevator Company v. Jim Rob Wills et al.* (June 13, 1935).

83. *Burrus Mill & Elevator Company v. Wills et al.*, 85 S.W. 2d 851 (1935).

84. Since the court overruled the petition for a rehearing, no opinion was written. The legal papers of Goodall and Stafford contain fifteen pages of not only legal material (such as the motion for rehearing written by O'Daniel's attorneys), but also historical material on Wills and the Doughboys.

85. O. W. Mayo. Also Bob Wills; Kermit Whalin; June Whalin; Johnnie Lee Wills; Sleepy Johnson; Durwood Brown; Herman Arnspiger.

86. Bob Wills to Harold Stafford, Feb. 17, 1934; O. W. Mayo to Vernon Goodall and Stafford, July 17, 1934; Goodall to Mayo, Sept. 6, 1934, Jan. 10, May 21, 28, 1935; Mayo to Goodall, May 25, 1935.

87. Vernon Goodall. Also Bob Wills; Bob Wills (Hank Penny interview); O. W. Mayo; Leon McAuliffe; Kermit Whalin; June Whalin; Johnnie Lee Wills.

7

The Spread of Western Jazz

Bob Wills rode into Tulsa it was just five years ago.
A fiddling Texas cowboy, I mean he was out of dough.
But soon he got a job a playing on KVOO.
Now he rambles through the country and the towns.

Play Boy Flour is what they sell, it really makes good dough,
The more you use this Play Boy Flour the more the boys will go.
The more you use, the more you'll hear them on the radio,
For it's Play Boy through the country and the town.

"The Texas Playboys" (Tune: "Oh!
Didn't He Ramble"), written by a fan

During the Christmas holidays in 1933, Wills decided to leave Waco. With the cotton season over, he felt that money would be in short supply there. He had planned for some time to move to Oklahoma; he was fairly well known in the Oklahoma City area, where the Doughboy broadcast was heard over KOMA. Late in January, 1934, Wills and Mayo drove to Oklahoma City to talk with the program director at KOMA regarding a show for the Playboys. Mayo recalled that the manager was frank: "Bob, I would like to put you on the station, but O'Daniel will not stand for it. Burrus Mill is paying for a daily Doughboys broadcast over this station." "We understood," Mayo continued, "KOMA was not going to jeopardize a bird in the hand for one that may be in the bush. We knew from what he did in Texas, O'Daniel would go to no end to cancel our show."[1] They went from KOMA to WKY, where the program director booked them for a sustaining show to begin in February.

Wills and Mayo returned to Waco to finish their engagements there, and in a few days they were ready to leave. Mayo went ahead to "survey the territory and book some dates." The station manager at WACO, Everett Stover, decided to quit his job and go with the band. Bob did not really need him, but Stover had given him a break in a new territory when he desperately needed it. Wills, not knowing that Stover was a trumpeter who had led the governor's band in Austin and had played in the New Orleans Symphony, hired him as his announcer.[2] The band had grown to seven

members: Bob Wills was on fiddle; Tommy Duncan, piano and vocals; Kermit Whalin, bass and steel guitar; Johnnie Lee Wills, tenor banjo; June Whalin, guitar; Don Ivey, piano; and Wills's cousin, Son Lansford, fiddle, guitar, and bass. When the band arrived in Waco, they did not own a car between them; but when they left, they went "in style." They paid $157 for a seven-passenger Lincoln sedan originally owned by a former governor of Texas, Pat M. Neff. Such a big crowd gathered at the WACO studio for their farewell broadcast, it took nearly two hours for the band to say good-bye to the hundreds of well-wishers who came to see them off.[3] The seven Playboys tied their instruments in and on their "limousine" and rode part of the way and pushed too much of the way to Oklahoma City.[4]

The band began broadcasting over WKY as soon as they arrived in Oklahoma City, and, for the first time, they were billed as Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys.[5] This was in late January or early February, 1934. Mayo had booked the band for two dance dates, "one at El Reno and one somewhere else." Fan mail began to pour in, and it looked as if Oklahoma City could turn out to be a good location. Their program was a sustaining show, but Wills felt a sponsor would be forthcoming. They made no more than five broadcasts, however, before W. Lee O'Daniel ruined their whole operation in Oklahoma City. Daryl McAllister, the program director, called Wills and Mayo to his office to tell them they were going to have to be taken off the air. McAllister's reason, Mayo remembered, was that "O'Daniel called the management and told them he had been considering taking his program off KOMA and putting it on WKY, but as long as Bob Wills was on WKY he would not consider it. He made this comment strong enough to believe that if he put us off he would bring his show on WKY, and they took us off."[6] McAllister was "very upset about the whole affair and was merely the hatchet man" for the higher echelon in this nasty job. "We couldn't even get in to see the manager to explain what we had gone through with O'Daniel down there in Texas, to explain it and give our side of it," Mayo said.

Since the station had agreed to give them a show, McAllister evidently felt obligated to help the band if he could. After all, nine men, some with families, had given up a radio program and an established territory in Waco to move to Oklahoma City because they believed WKY's promises. Moreover, he knew that the Depression was making jobs scarcer every day. McAllister told Wills and Mayo he believed they could get on a new station that had just opened in Tulsa. He called the manager of KTUL, who said, "Send them over." So after less than a week in Oklahoma City, the Texas Playboys were forced out. Bob Wills had confronted the power of W. Lee O'Daniel again and had come away the loser. Ironically, so had WKY. O'Daniel had his cake and ate it, too; he got rid of Wills in Oklahoma City but never did put his show on WKY. In less than twenty-four months WKY

would have made many concessions to hire Wills back, but they had had their chance at the man who would make radio history in Oklahoma.[7]

The future looked bleak on February 9, 1934, the day Wills, Mayo, and Stover left the band in a rooming house in Oklahoma City and drove to Tulsa on the chance they might get a show on the new station. Even if they did get it, Bob reasoned, there would be no money in it for them, and O'Daniel could follow them there and probably get it cancelled. Things looked worse than they had the day he walked out of Turkey after a night in jail. He was nearly broke and virtually unknown in Tulsa, and his conscience kept reminding him he had taken his musicians from good jobs, some of them twice. Bob was almost beside himself as Mayo drove his Plymouth over the rough road to Tulsa. No one was saying anything. All three men were staring at the scenery, their eyes almost glassy, as if they were just looking at nothing and were in deep thought. Finally, Mayo broke the silence. "Bob, this new station KTUL has only 250 or 500 watts. KVOO has 25,000 watts. Let's go and see them first. It won't hurt anything, and if we don't get on KVOO we can go on over to KTUL."[8] They went to KVOO and asked to see the manager. He was out, but the secretaries got in touch with him. "He came in, and we sat down," Mayo said, "and told him the story of O'Daniel, everything, the lawsuit in Waco, how he got our show cancelled in Oklahoma City, the truth." The station manager, W. B. "Bill" Way, was a short, pudgy fellow who often made quick decisions, but stuck to them. Mayo remembered Way's questions. " 'Where is the band at now?' We told him it was in Oklahoma City. He said, 'How soon can you get them here?' 'As soon as we call them,' Bob answered. Way said, 'There is the telephone. I'll tell you what we will do. Ordinarily we go off the air at midnight, but when the boys get in tonight, we will put you on the air at midnight for one hour.' "[9] They had another chance in Oklahoma.

While they waited for the band to come from Oklahoma City, Wills, Mayo, and Stover had to find a place for the band to live. They were nearly broke; they had paid their rent in advance in Oklahoma City and forfeited it. While Mayo and Stover stopped at a drugstore, Wills went across the street to inquire about a room. When he explained who he was, the landlady replied, "Bob, I've heard you many times." He told her the story of their tough breaks, and she agreed to help them if they "didn't mind living in her basement." She had "cots, bunks, a stove, and everything for light housekeeping," Mayo remarked. There was enough room for all nine members of the organization. About nine or ten that night the band got to Tulsa. Mayo said it looked like a gypsy caravan. "That big old Lincoln sedan . . . had that bass fiddle tied on top and all the suitcases and the musical instruments and everything on it."[10]

The caravan made its way from the basement apartment to the basement of the Wright Building, where the KVOO studios were located. At

midnight Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys broadcast for the first time over KVOO.[11] They offered an eight-by-ten picture of the band to the person who sent a letter from farthest away; an Oakland, California, woman won the photograph. Bill Way and others at KVOO liked what they heard and put the Playboys on a sustaining program. At first they played a morning broadcast from 7:30 to 8:00 A.M. Then they alternated morning and afternoon broadcasts: one week they were on in the morning, and the next they broadcast at 5:00 or 6:00 P.M. During their first week at KVOO, they "didn't try to book anything. We got the pulse of the people," Mayo said. "We tried to build our popularity. Mail began to pour in, and we began to get offers for jobs."[12]

The first paying job they played came during their second week in Tulsa. It was a dance at Oilton, about fifty miles from Tulsa, near Drumright. They charged seventy-five cents a person at that dance, and the band received 75 percent of the gate.[13] "We made enough out of the dance in Oilton to get our clothes cleaned, pay some rent, and buy an extra dozen eggs," Mayo remarked.[14] "Everything was on commonwealth," Johnnie Lee recalled. "Every man got an equal share."[15] During those early years in Tulsa, Bob Wills received no more than the other members of the band. Like most Depression bandleaders, he used the commonwealth system in all his bands until the mid-1930s. As Durwood Brown pointed out, "No one man had the money to finance a band in the Depression."[16]

The entire Wills organization lived in the basement apartment. After everything was paid—travel, room and board, and other "common expenses"—the money was divided equally among the nine men.[17] During the first weeks in Tulsa, there was little left to divide. Kermit Whalin distinctly remembered that each man received only $2.75 for the Oilton dance.[18] "If eggs were a nickel cheaper across the Arkansas River," Mayo added, "we went over and saved a nickel." Mayo had to sell his five shares of City Service stock. "It cost me ninety dollars, and I sold it for only twenty. But that was one hundred dollars, and we had to have it. We were cooperating. We never got discouraged. We had confidence in what we could do. We had seen what we could do in Waco."[19]

Within thirty days of their arrival in Tulsa, they were playing somewhere every night except Sunday. "It might be only a school program, but we had some engagement every night," Mayo remarked. "In those days the oil fields were booming. At Bristow, Chandler, Pawhuska, Cushing, Seminole, Drumwright, and Oilton, there was lots of drilling." They had some regular engagements, such as at Seminole, where they played every two weeks. As their reputation spread, so did their dance circuit. They began to travel more and get a little farther away. A few months after they arrived in Tulsa, the old Lincoln made travel difficult and uncertain. "I never will forget it," Mayo laughed. "We knew the battery wouldn't start it,

so we parked it on a hillside where we could push it and start it. We would come out to load up, and a lot of people who had been to the dance would stand around and watch us leave. They would say, 'You mean you left the switch on,' and so on and so forth. 'You let the battery run down.' We knew it was not going to start, but we made out like someone left the switch on or lights or something else. The people helped us push it off, and we came on in." They finally bought a new Chevrolet sedan, had it cut in two and a new section welded in to lengthen it, so that extra seats could be added. They called it the "stretched-out Chevrolet."

In the meantime the band still had only a sustaining show on KVOO. The station sold some spots, but this only helped pay for the radio time, and the band did not get anything out of it, at least not in the way of money. Wills was content just to be on the air and have a place to advertise his dance schedule. He feared, in fact, that he might not stay at KVOO on any basis if O'Daniel and Burrus Mill used their power to get his show cancelled again. He and Mayo told Way that O'Daniel would call him sooner or later and try to do what he had done in Oklahoma City. It was sooner. They had been broadcasting only a few days when O'Daniel called Way. O. W. Mayo remarked that O'Daniel in a way actually tried to bribe Way by implying that "if he would kick Bob off he would come on. Way was smart. Hell! He had never called him before." According to Way, George Cranston, manager of WBAP, also called him in behalf of O'Daniel and tried to get him to take Wills off KVOO. "I told Mr. Cranston that I would have to take the matter up with Mr. [W. G.] Skelly. Of course it isn't likely Mr. Skelly will tell me to take the program off the air as long as he understands Bob Wills's side of the story and knows O'Daniel is merely carrying on a personal jealous grudge fight against Bob in order to break up his band and destroy his means of livelihood. . . . So don't you boys worry about it," Way told Wills, Mayo, and Stover. "I'm satisfied that unless something unforseen comes up, you will keep right on playing over KVOO in spite of O'Daniel or anyone else. . . ."[20]

O'Daniel soon learned that Bill Way was made of "tough stuff" and the integrity of KVOO was not for sale. Very firmly, Way told O'Daniel, "We got all the time in the world if you want to buy it; but we will run our business." Way made it clear that the management of KVOO would hire whom they wished. "We own this station in fee," Way said, "and we are certainly not going to let O'Daniels [*sic*] or anyone else tell us what we should or should not do." In spite of Way's rebuffs, O'Daniel continued tenaciously in his effort to get Wills removed from KVOO. As late as the summer of 1935, when Mayo mailed a twenty-five-dollar payment to Bob's lawyers in Waco, he added: "P.S. I might add W. Lee continues to send in a letter occassionally [*sic*] to the management of KVOO but so far he hasn't had any luck. O.W.M."[21] O'Daniel put the Light Crust Doughboys on

KVOO anyway, but the show did not last long. Wills, on the other hand, was there to stay. In fact, either he or his brother would have programs on KVOO for the next twenty-four years.[22] Wills and O'Daniel had clashed again, and this time Wills did not leave in defeat as he had twice before.

In September, 1934, just one year after Wills left the Light Crust Doughboys, KVOO signed a contract with the makers of Crazy Water Crystals for a program at 12:30 P.M. The sponsor's contract required that Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys play the show. Still no pay.[23] But Wills was convinced he could build a good dance circuit with this prime time. It was the age of radio, and nearly everyone listened while eating lunch. Actually, the show for Crazy Water Crystals was only fifteen minutes, but KVOO gave Wills and the band fifteen extra minutes for playing it; Mayo called it a "reciprocal deal." For the next fourteen months, the Texas Playboys had the prime time of 12:30 to 1:00 P.M. six days a week over KVOO. Wills began to do very well. But who should appear again? W. Lee O'Daniel. This time, Wills was not fearful that he would get his show cancelled, for O'Daniel no longer had the power of Burrus Mill behind him. Members of Wills's staff and band believed Burrus Mill had fired him. O'Daniel had also lost the Light Crust Doughboys and had assembled another group, the Hillbilly Boys.[24] O. W. Mayo said disgustedly, "He had the guts to try to make a merger with his Hillbilly Boys and Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys after he didn't have Burrus Mill's money to fight us."[25] Mayo would really have been disgusted had he known that O'Daniel also tried to get Mayo's job as Bob Wills's manager. In spite of all he had done and tried to do to Wills, Wills treated him with respect and politely said he did not wish to be involved in any partnership.[26] Bob Wills had finally heard the last of W. Lee O'Daniel, even if Texas had not: four years later, O'Daniel was elected governor of Texas and later United States senator.[27]

When the contract with the makers of Crazy Water Crystals expired in the fall of 1935, after a fourteen-month run, Bob brought off something of an economic coup. He and O. W. Mayo had been negotiating with E. M. Jones of the Red Star Milling Company, a subsidiary of General Mills, regarding a contract to advertise its flour on a new show. Jones took them to Wichita, Kansas, to meet with other officials of the company. Wills had already arranged with KVOO to purchase the prime time from 12:30 to 1:00 P.M. six days a week, the same time they had been playing the Crazy Water show.[28] If Wills was not the first, he was among the first artists to purchase his own radio time and then sell his own show. He was as unorthodox in this respect as he was in music; but he was young, and orthodoxy meant nothing to him. If there was no precedent, he did not fear pioneering and setting one. For a man who had been broke a year earlier, Wills was taking quite a gamble; radio time alone cost $12,000 a year.[29]

Wills did not actually sell the show to the Red Star Milling Company. He wanted them to develop a new flour, to be labelled, appropriately, Play Boy flour, and advertise it only on his radio program. With such a procedure, they could determine just what results the show got. The company was to pay Wills a royalty for each barrel of flour sold.[30] The contract was signed, and Play Boy flour was marketed for the first time in November, 1935. In twenty-four months, Play Boy flour was selling as well as brands that had been on the market for forty years. Most of this success was due to the popularity of the Texas Playboys' daily radio show. But some was the result of hard work and skillful promotion on the part of Mayo, Wills, and the Playboys. Wills and Mayo issued franchises to hometown bakeries in Oklahoma and Kansas to bake Play Boy bread.[31] The bakers bought their flour from the Red Star Milling Company and the colorful Play Boy bread wrappers from Wills. Mayo, in particular, worked many hours each week with these bakeries. For several months the band played its regular noon broadcast at a Barrel Food Palace store, part of a grocery chain, in Tulsa. They also played special openings for bakeries and grocery stores that made Play Boy bread or sold Play Boy flour.[32] On such occasions when the band could not appear, Mayo sent out a little panel truck equipped with a public address system and played records by Bob and the Playboys. At the Tulsa State Fair, Kansas State Fair, and similar events, the Texas Playboys did special shows and broadcast at the booths that displayed Play Boy flour and Play Boy bread. They also performed at bakers' conventions held in their sales area.[33]

Another selling gimmick was the inclusion of a certain Playboy's "favorite recipe" and picture in a sack of flour. Everett Stover,[34] their radio announcer, would say, "Ladies, this week when you buy your sack of Play Boy Flour you will receive absolutely free a picture of our bass player, Joe Ferguson, and his favorite recipe, raspberry puddin'." This recipe called for three cups of Play Boy bread crumbs. Jesse Ashlock's favorite was bread sticks made of "Play Boy left-over sliced bread, melted butter, and cheese." It is difficult to see how Sleepy Johnson's favorite recipe, Play Boy stale bread fritters, sold bread—maybe it was a Depression favorite also. Al Stricklin's favorite was supposed to be peach betty, of which he said thirty-five years later, "I still don't know what peach betty was."[35] Though Play Boy flour probably came out of the same bin as other quality Red Star flours, housewives wrote the Playboys that it was the best they had ever used. They wrote poems and songs about it and testimonials for it.[36] One fan sent them the lyrics to a song she had composed. It was to be played to the music of the jazz classic "Oh! Didn't He Ramble" and was entitled "The Texas Playboys."[37] The first and last verses read as follows:

> Bob Wills rode into Tulsa it was just five years ago.
> A fiddling Texas cowboy, I mean he was out of dough.

But soon he got a job a playing on KVOO.
Now he rambles through the country and the towns.

Play Boy Flour is what they sell, it really makes good dough,
The more you use this Play Boy Flour the more the boys will go.
The more you use, the more you'll hear them on the radio,
For it's Play Boy through the country and the town.

The success of the show, reflected by the sale of Play Boy flour and Play Boy bread, was remarkable. It was a very good arrangement for both Bob Wills and the Red Star Milling Company. Wills's business manager said, "We never made any surplus money out of the show, but it kept us in front of the public. We paid our radio time, and we were independent, and it gave us an amount of prestige."[38] At the time Wills celebrated his first anniversary with Play Boy flour, the Red Star vice-president and general manager expressed the company's appreciation of the show and, more importantly, the sale of the flour: "It gives us great pleasure to say to you unsolicited that as the manufacturers of Play Boy Flour we have never had a more satisfactory connection than the one we have with Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys."[39] It was to prove a long association: Bob and Johnnie Lee Wills together broadcast six days a week for General Mills for the next twenty-three years.[40]

1. O. W. Mayo; Bob Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; Edna Wills; Edna Wills, "What I Know"; Robbie Wills Calhoun; June Whalin; Kermit Whalin; Son Lansford; Ruth Sheldon, *Hubbin' It: The Life of Bob Wills* (Tulsa: Privately published, 1938), pp. 120–121.

2. Bob Wills; O. W. Mayo; Edna Wills; Edna Wills, "What I Know"; Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* pp. 119–120.

3. O. W. Mayo. According to Wills's sponsor, George O. Jones, the Amicable Building was so crowded the band could not even get from the studio or halls to the elevator.

4. Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* p. 121. For a brief discussion of the Lincoln limousine, listen to Bob Wills and Tommy Duncan (T. Texas Tiny interview). Also June Whalin; Kermit Whalin; O. W. Mayo; Bob Wills; Edna Wills; Roger N. Conger to Hallie Maude Wilcox (Neff's daughter), Apr. 26, 1973; Wilcox to Conger, n.d.; Woody M. Barron to me, Apr. 30, 1973.

5. O. W. Mayo; Wakefield Holley, WKY, to me, Mar. 14, 1973. On the use of the terms *Playboys* and *Texas Playboys,* my interview with Edna Wills and her "What I Know" were valuable. Bob Wills told me it was Mayo's idea to call the band Texas Playboys; Mayo suggested the addition of *Texas* after they moved to Oklahoma City.

6. Bob Wills; O. W. Mayo; Kermit Whalin; June Whalin. Daryl McAllister stated, "O'Daniel had a lot of power but why he wanted Wills off I don't know. Some feud or other" (McAllister to me, Mar. 28, 1973). Regarding the removal of the Playboy show from WKY, W. B. Way told Wills that George Cranston, manager of WBAP, cited the reason as "complaints from O'Daniels [*sic*] of the Burrus Mill & Elevator Co" (Bob Wills to Harold Stafford, Feb. 17, 1934). Wills's letter, written less than two weeks after he began broadcasting over KVOO on February 9, was cast in the form of an interview at KVOO that included W. B. Way, O. W. Mayo, Everett Stover, and himself. Wills sent it to Stafford in Waco in preparation for the lawsuit O'Daniel had either already appealed or had planned to appeal to the Tenth Court of Civil Appeals. In it he had O. W. Mayo say, "Mr. McCallester [*sic*] said that WKY considered the Burrus Mill & Elevator Co. as a potential account and that for business reasons they felt it best to discontinue the programs."

7. Bob Wills. Wills told me WKY tried for two or three years to get him to come back to Oklahoma City and appear regularly on WKY. See "Local Radio Station Comes Full Cycle," *Tulsa Sunday World,* Aug. 15, 1971; "Bob Wills: Inventor of Western Swing," *Billboard,* Feb. 26, 1972, p. 28.

8. O. W. Mayo.

9. Ibid.; Bob Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills. For a discussion of KVOO, see "Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys Celebrating 4 Years of Broadcasting over KVOO," "Philtower Establishments Commend Progress of KVOO," and "Salute to W. G. Skelly the Tower Builder," *Tulsa Tribune,* Feb. 6, 1938; "Local Radio Station Comes Full Cycle"; Terrell Lester, "Bob Wills—Living Legend," *Tulsa Sunday World,* Nov. 21, 1971. See especially "Bob Wills 1934 . . . Johnnie Lee Wills 1949—Celebrating 15 Years of Broadcasting over KVOO," *Tulsa Daily World,* Feb. 6, 1949.

10. O. W. Mayo; June Whalin; Kermit Whalin; Bob Wills; Herman Arnspiger; Leon McAuliffe; Al Stricklin; Bob Wills and Tommy Duncan (T. Texas Tiny interview); Son Lansford.

11. Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* p. 122; O. W. Mayo; Bob Wills; Kermit Whalin; Johnnie Lee Wills; June Whalin; Son Lansford.

12. O. W. Mayo. Wills's midnight broadcasts were heard all over the United States, and in 1942 a listener picked them up in Barcelona, Venezuela (W. L. Taylor to Bob Wills, Sept. 21, 1942). Also Kermit Whalin; June Whalin. See especially Kermit Whalin Scrapbook.

13. Bob Wills; O. W. Mayo. According to Mayo, Wills began to quit the commonwealth system in 1935, when he signed a contract with the Red Star Milling Company for broadcasts over KVOO. This company wanted to deal with only one man, not the whole band; so the band members signed over all their rights to Wills.

14. O. W. Mayo. Also Kermit Whalin; June Whalin; Edna Wills; Bob Wills; Son Lansford.

15. Johnnie Lee Wills.

16. Durwood Brown. Also Kermit Whalin; June Whalin; Son Lansford.

17. O. W. Mayo; Bob Wills; June Whalin; Kermit Whalin; Edna Wills; Robbie Wills Calhoun; Edna Wills Scrapbook; Robbie Wills Calhoun Scrapbook; Kermit Whalin Scrapbook; Herman Arnspiger Scrapbook; June Whalin Scrapbook.

18. Kermit Whalin.

19. O. W. Mayo. Also Bob Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; Edna Wills; Son Lansford.

20. Bob Wills to Harold Stafford, Feb. 17, 1934. See also Vernon Goodall to O. W. Mayo, Sept. 17, 1934; Bob Wills; Edna Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; Kermit Whalin; June Whalin; Herman Arnspiger; and especially O. W. Mayo.

21. O. W. Mayo to Vernon Goodall and Harold Stafford, July 17, 1935. Also O. W. Mayo; Bob Wills; Edna Wills; Edna Wills, "What I Know."

22. Bob Wills; O. W. Mayo; Johnnie Lee Wills; Betty Wills.

23. Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* pp. 123–124; June Whalin; Kermit Whalin; O. W. Mayo.

24. For a discussion of this group, see Bob Healy, "W. Lee O'Daniel and His Hillbilly Boys," *Country Directory,* No. 4 (n.d.), pp. 8–13 (includes discography).

25. O. W. Mayo.

26. Bob Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; Al Stricklin; O. W. Mayo; Herman Arnspiger; June Whalin; Kermit Whalin.

27. Despite the underhanded way O'Daniel treated Wills, Bob continued to be interested in O'Daniel's career. See Ada Perry Scrapbook; Al Stricklin Scrapbook; Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook; June Whalin; Kermit Whalin; Kermit Whalin Scrapbook.

28. O. W. Mayo.

29. Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* pp. 129–130; Bob Wills.

30. O. W. Mayo; Bob Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills.

31. In February, 1938, forty bakeries in Oklahoma and Kansas were producing Play Boy bread. See "Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys Celebrating 4 Years."

32. O. W. Mayo; Lander Brothers Food Store, Coffeyville, Kans., to Bob Wills, Feb. 12, 1938. The food stores often reciprocated by including such lines in their advertisements as "Help Bob celebrate his 4th Anniversary on KVOO" and "Tune in over KVOO—Enjoy

Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys." See Ada Perry Scrapbook, also the program from the third annual meeting of the Budget Busters, Red Star Milling Co., Jan. 8–9, 1937, in Herman Arnspiger Scrapbook. See R. T. Howle, Sales Manager, Red Star Milling Co., to Bob Wills, Jan. 11, 1938; Glen B. Futzs, Assistant Sales Manager, Kansas Milling Co., to Bob Wills, June 2, 1938.

33. Herman Arnspiger Scrapbook; Al Stricklin Scrapbook; Ada Perry Scrapbook; Kermit Whalin Scrapbook; June Whalin Scrapbook; O. W. Mayo. Bob and the band had learned a good deal about the promotion of flour from O'Daniel. See especially Durwood Brown Scrapbook and my interview with Brown.

34. In the early 1940s, Wills hired Allan Franklin as his regular announcer, and Stover gave most of his time to playing trumpet in the band. Listen to Bob Wills; Betty Wills; and especially Danny Alguire.

35. Al Stricklin. See also Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook; Al Stricklin Scrapbook; Joe Ferguson Scrapbook; Ada Perry Scrapbook; Herman Arnspiger Scrapbook; O. W. Mayo Scrapbook; Kermit Whalin Scrapbook; June Whalin Scrapbook; Edna Wills Scrapbook; Robbie Wills Calhoun Scrapbook; O. W. Mayo; Edna Wills; Bob Wills; Herman Arnspiger; Joe Ferguson; Leon McAuliffe; Smokey Dacus.

36. Frankie Chestnut, a nurse, was such a loyal fan that she persuaded the dietician at the Cushing hospital to use Play Boy flour exclusively in the hospital kitchen. See telegram to Bob Wills from Frankie Chestnut, Nov. 2, 1938; Wills to Chestnut, Nov. 4, 1938.

37. I am indebted to Wills's secretary, Ada Perry, for a copy of this song, preserved in her scrapbook with other material on the Tulsa years. As far as I can determine, it is the only copy in existence.

38. O. W. Mayo; Bob Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills.

39. Ross E. Anderson to Bob Wills, Oct. 29, 1936.

40. Johnnie Lee Wills; Bob Wills; O. W. Mayo; J. S. Hargett, President, Southwestern Division of General Mills, to Bob Wills, Dec. 23, 1937; M. C. Saver, General Mills, Southwestern Division, to Bob Wills, Jan. 10, 1938. See also H. C. Neal, "50th Anniversary of Radio Broadcasting," *Oklahoma Today,* 20, no. 4 (Autumn, 1970), 31–35. George Rhoades reported that the Wills brothers' programs ran nearly twenty-five years and comprised "the longest continuous daily broadcast in the nation until it ended in 1958" (" 'Nothing Fancy, Just Good Music'—Texas Playboy Improves," *Tulsa Daily World,* Dec. 2, 1962).

8

Music out of a Straitjacket

Bob Wills would not allow music to be put into a straitjacket.
It did not have to conform to anything but human feeling.
William Eschol Dacus

About the time Wills was negotiating for the radio show with General Mills in the fall of 1935, he had a recording session for Brunswick in Dallas, the first with his Texas Playboys. He was busy in the spring and summer trying to develop an acceptable band for the session. Ever since he arrived in Tulsa in February, 1934, he had been concerned with building a better band. Almost from their first KVOO broadcast the Playboys were praised by their listeners, and they were about the only band in Tulsa in those Depression days "that was working and making money." Yet Wills knew there were many weak spots. One fine musician, who later played in the Wills band for more than twenty years, remembered that when Wills first came to Tulsa he had the "worst band you ever heard. Yet he was hanging them from the rafters. No one in the band could play."[1] Wills himself admitted he often had to clown in order to cover up its many mistakes.

He made many improvements, however, in the nineteen months between his arrival in Tulsa and the Brunswick session. Of the Playboys who came with Wills from Texas, only Tommy Duncan, Johnnie Lee Wills, Everett Stover, and Son Lansford were still in the group. Don Ivey "didn't fit into the band," and he left, about four weeks after the band got to Tulsa, to form the Alabama Boys. June and Kermit Whalin, two of the five original Texas Playboys, left about eight months later. June went on an NBC network show in New York City, and Kermit joined a band in Ohio.[2] Just before the Whalins left the band, Wills hired Herman Arnspiger, the first man he ever had in his Wills Fiddle Band, to play guitar. Arnspiger had left the Light Crust Doughboys to go to Tulsa because of a disagreement with O'Daniel over money. In the spring of 1934, the Doughboys made a theater tour, playing to packed houses three times a day in Houston and Oklahoma City. O'Daniel agreed to split everything equally with

the band after expenses were paid. When O'Daniel finally gave Arnspiger his share—ten dollars—Arnspiger quit. Before he left, Arnspiger learned from an official of Burrus Mill that the company had given O'Daniel its check to cover the tour expenses.[3] Wills hired a second violin player, Jesse Ashlock, one of his protégés from the early days at Crystal Springs. Ashlock's idol was not Wills, however, but the great jazz violinist Joe Venuti, and Ashlock's jazz style, particularly his choruses, reflected the Venuti influence. Since 1932, Ashlock had been playing with Milton Brown and his Musical Brownies.[4] When the Whalins left, Wills hired another guitar player from the Doughboys, Sleepy Johnson. Wills liked the way Johnson could "play rhythm and keep it constant."[5]

With Kermit Whalin's departure, Wills needed a steel guitar player. Ashlock, Arnspiger, and Johnson all recommended a young man by the name of Leon McAuliffe who was then playing for the Light Crust Doughboys. He was only sixteen when he joined the Doughboys and was just eighteen when he went to Tulsa on March 25, 1935, to become a Texas Playboy. Because he was so young, O'Daniel would never pay him what he did the other musicians. He started him at ten dollars a week in 1933. McAuliffe was so impoverished when he left the Doughboys he did not even have any clothing of his own and reported to Wills for work wearing a shirt labeled "Light Crust Doughboys." "Herman left because he only got ten dollars for the theater tour," McAuliffe laughed. "I didn't even get that. O'Daniel could have paid us more. He was later fired for fraudulent activities, turning our expenses in higher than they were."[6] Leon found a different environment in the Playboy band. Wills paid for his hotel room the first day or so he was in Tulsa, then asked him to live in his own home. He started McAuliffe at the same wage he paid the other new men he was hiring, thirty dollars a week. "You didn't have to ask Bob for a raise, he gave it to you," McAuliffe said.[7]

Since McAuliffe played both standard and steel guitar, he asked Wills when he arrived in Tulsa which he wanted him to play. Wills told him he liked the steel and wanted him to "make something out of it."[8] At McAuliffe's first broadcast, March 25, 1935, Wills asked him to play a tune that McAuliffe had written but not yet named. They later recorded it, and it became one of their greatest hits—a classic called "Steel Guitar Rag." There are authorities, McAuliffe among them, who believe this recording and the subsequent use of the instrument in Wills's organization played the leading role in making the steel guitar popular in American music. "It was another thing that we pioneered in Bob's band," McAuliffe remarked. "Bob wanted to be a first at everything. And he wanted to create."[9] If McAuliffe claimed too much for himself and Wills, it is no exaggeration to state that they were among the early pioneers of the steel guitar in popular dance music in America. When McAuliffe first started with the band, he

had only a standard guitar that he could change over into a "steel guitar" by making certain adjustments and using a steel bar as a slide. It was not amplified. Once in Fort Worth McAuliffe had played an amplified guitar that belonged to jazz guitarist Bob Dunn of Milton Brown's Brownies. Knowing Wills's desire to experiment with new means of musical expression, McAuliffe asked him in the spring of 1935, "Bob, have you heard an amplifier on a steel guitar? They sure sound great." Without a moment's hesitation Wills said, "Well, let's get one, kid." They went to Jenkins Music Store, and Wills reached into his pocket and paid $180 for an amplified steel guitar—McAuliffe's first. The instrument was so new that Jenkins had to order it.[10]

In the summer of 1935, Wills began looking for a piano player. Tommy Duncan had tried to play piano since the Playboys were first organized in Waco, but as he said, he "only banged around on it and didn't know what [he] was doing."[11] During a trip to Fort Worth in August, Wills went to the Cinderella Roof, where Alton Stricklin was playing with a group called the Hi Flyers. Wills and Stricklin had met once before, the day Wills brought his fiddle in a flour sack to KFJZ in 1930 and asked for an audition. Stricklin had worked his way through Baylor University by teaching piano, a "short method" frowned upon by the School of Music. He also played in a jazz band at Baylor known as the Unholy Three, an interesting name considering Baylor's religious affiliation. "It was the Jazz Age," Stricklin said, "and all I ever tried to play was jazz. Earl 'Fatha' Hines was the pianist that influenced me most." Stricklin had just the background and style to fit the Playboys' needs. "At intermission, Bob and I went over to a booth," Stricklin recalled. "Kid, I want to talk to you," Wills said. "How would you like to come to work for me? We are going to make some records, make our first records in October. I need a piano player." Stricklin said, "Bob, anybody would like to work for you."[12] Wills told him to think it over and if he really wanted the job to write him. On August 23, Stricklin wrote Wills, and on August 29 Wills wrote back with an offer of thirty dollars a week: "If you are interested, you may make your arrangements and come ahead just as soon as you can."[13] In a few days the jazz pianist, who had never played in a western band in his life, joined the Texas Playboys. Other than the frontier fiddle music, Stricklin said, "There was no difference in playing with Bob and jazz bands I've played with. Since I was the first piano player Bob ever worked with, I set the style for piano players in western bands. Bob didn't want the piano to play melody. When he told the piano player to tear it up, you went into orbit. I played hokum, we called it. I can't play the same way twice, I write it as I go. To save my life I can't play the same tune twice. You compose and create as you play. When Bob gave me the chorus, I played jazz."[14] The style set by

Al Stricklin between 1935 and 1941 became the style every other Wills pianist followed.

Perhaps the most radical development in Bob Wills's band was his incorporation of brass and reed instruments. Everett Stover, the erstwhile manager of station WACO in Texas, mistakenly assumed Bob brought him from Waco to play trumpet.[15] During their brief stay in Oklahoma City, he showed up at a dance with his horn. Bob said, "He was standing back there on the bandstand, holding his trumpet, and he didn't know what to do. And I didn't know what to do, but I had to let him do something. He couldn't just stand there all night. So I gave him some choruses."[16] Bob liked the trumpet in his "string band," and from that day on he never had a string band again.[17]

This is not to suggest that Bob's addition of horns was accidental. It was not. According to both Bob and Edna Wills, one reason he moved to Oklahoma "was to build a big horn band."[18] He soon added another horn player. A few weeks after the band arrived in Tulsa, they moved from their basement quarters to a better and larger apartment. The apartment manager's son, Robert "Zeb" McNally, began to show up at rehearsals with his saxophone. Zeb played well, and Bob took a liking to the plump, spectacled young man and allowed him to continue coming to rehearsal. Once in a while, especially when one of the regular musicians was sick or out of town, Bob let Zeb sit in for a dance. When he did, he paid Zeb five dollars a night, the same as most of his salaried musicians at the time. Only those musicians who had come from Waco with the band or joined shortly after they moved to Tulsa were in the commonwealth.[19] Soon Zeb began to show up for all the broadcasts, and every time the bus left town, Zeb and his sax were on it. One day in the summer of 1934, Bob told Zeb to unload his saxophone and added, "You can't go anymore." Zeb pleaded to stay in the band, offered to work for a dollar a night, and when that did not sway Wills, informed him, "Bob, you never hired me, so you sure can't fire me."[20] He got in the bus and was a Texas Playboy for the next several years. In fact, he not only played saxophone and clarinet, he was also soon designated "Judge" McNally by Wills, to handle disciplinary problems in the band.

About the time Zeb began making periodic appearances with the band, Wills hired Art Haines to play trombone. Haines had been assistant director of a band in the Marine Corps and had played with his father and two brothers in a group called the Four Aces.[21] He was typical of the trombonists who reached maturity in the Jazz Age, and his trombone work gave the Texas Playboy band from 1934 to 1936 a New Orleans jazz quality that at times would have pleased a purist.

Most leaders of string bands in that period, and nearly all since, would not consider using horns.[22] Milton Brown, who began his career as a Wills

protégé, and the Light Crust Doughboys, originally a Wills group, both refused to add horns during the entire life of their bands.[23] String bands in Nashville and most rock groups still do not use horns, though some Nashville artists now record with Danny Davis and the Nashville Brass. Musical "experts," especially in the big swing bands, claimed the combination would not work and announced that Wills did not know what he was doing.[24] Ten years later (and twenty-five years before ending his career), when he was outdrawing some of his critics, he said, "Hell, I know what I'm doin' all right—I'm just playin' the kind of music my kind of folks like to hear."[25] Their making fun of Wills bothered him, but it did not stop him. He was a musical pioneer who was willing to break new musical ground, just as he and his father had broken the virgin soil of West Texas, to see what it might yield.

The addition of Stover and his trumpet marked the most important change Wills ever made in his music—for that was the first time he added a jazz instrument to his string band. There was, of course, nothing unique in the way his musicians used traditional jazz instruments (clarinet, saxophone, trombone, trumpet, piano); they used them as other jazz and swing artists did. However, his musicians who played stringed instruments (fiddle, guitar, steel guitar, banjo) learned to play them like a jazz horn, playing notes so that they resembled the blasts of a jazz trumpet or the wails of a jazz clarinet. Leon McAuliffe, for instance, often made his steel guitar substitute for a tailgate trombone by sliding the steel bar along the strings.[26] Referring to the more orthodox swing bands, Jesse Ashlock said, "We tried to do the same thing on strings they did on horns."[27] The uniqueness of Wills's music was his combining traditional jazz instruments with stringed instruments, all of them playing in a jazz or swing style. Eventually Wills added enough brass and reeds to play popular dance music in a manner that rivaled the big swing bands. But that was not until the late 1930s and early 1940s; in the mid-1930s he was still much closer to the jazz of New Orleans than to the swing of Chicago and New York.

After Wills added the horns to his band, he began trying to develop a better rhythm section. Up to the early weeks of 1935, he had used piano, guitar, tenor banjo, and bass. One would think that would have sufficed for a man whose first rhythm section consisted of Herman Arnspiger's guitar. But it did not. He decided to add drums—another radical departure for string bands in that period. The Light Crust Doughboys and other string bands in the "cradle of western swing," Fort Worth, never used them.[28] Milton Brown used them only when a contract called for it, but never on the radio or in recording sessions.[29] When Wills played the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville after the war, Opry officials informed him that "there will be no drums nor horns." Only when he told the boys to "pack up, we're going home," did the officials agree to such musical heresy.[30]

Later, nearly all the country bands in Nashville, and certainly all the rockabillies, followed the Wills lead of 1935. This was another area of American music that Bob Wills pioneered. Actually, he had experimented with drums as early as 1927, when he played them himself in Roy, New Mexico.[31]

Wills began looking for a drummer in late 1934. Most drummers in Tulsa were out of work and Wills could have hired a whole band of them. But the one he wanted was a young fellow he found playing with an orchestra at a Tulsa hotel during the first weeks of 1935. William Eschol Dacus—"Smokey," as Wills called him—was born in Quinton, Oklahoma, and began his career by playing banjo in a dixieland jazz band at Blackwell High School. He switched to drums because no one else would play them. When he graduated, at sixteen, he was offered a scholarship at the University of Tulsa on condition he play drums in the college dance band. At the university he joined the Eight Collegiates, "strictly a dixieland jazz band." In 1929 Dacus left the university and became a professional musician. "In 1935, Bob Wills decided he wanted a drummer and approached me. I couldn't see that they needed a drummer for *their kind* of music."[32]

Dacus admitted that he, like other musicians in Tulsa, felt he was above Wills's music. In fact, Wills was in Tulsa nearly two years before his boys were allowed to join the union. Even then, they would not have joined had it not been for an incident in Fort Smith, Arkansas. Union members there picketed one of their dances. Johnnie Lee remembered that the picketers finally got tired and came in and danced. Nevertheless, Bob feared similar incidents would occur if they were not in the union. When they got back to Tulsa, they demanded the right to membership. As Bob pointed out, "We would have joined long ago, but we didn't think you wanted us." Wills and his band members *had* tried to join when they first arrived in Tulsa but were told by officials at the Tulsa local that they "were not musicians" and did not play what could be correctly called "music." Only reading musicians, according to the local, were considered musicians, and only they were allowed to join the union. But by the time of the Fort Smith episode, Bob and the Playboys were becoming affluent and famous, and the union reluctantly received them.[33]

Dacus's attitude toward Wills soon changed, however. "He offered me four times what I was making," Dacus said, and with that kind of money he agreed Wills definitely needed a drummer.[34]

This was the first time drums were successfully used in a string band, and Wills knew what he wanted them to accomplish. With the instruments he was then using, his rhythm section could not create the solid dance beat he desired.[35] The addition of Dacus achieved this. It also moved the band further from traditional fiddle or string band music and even closer to jazz. "I didn't have to change from the dixieland jazz style I'd been playing,"

Dacus pointed out. The beat Wills was using before Dacus joined the band was the same rhythm, "born of the dixieland beat,"[36] which Wills learned so much about from the Negroes in the cotton camps and cotton fields of Texas.[37] They both called it a "two-four beat." Dacus played with the brush in his left hand and the stick in his right. "On the downbeats, one and three, I brushed the drum; the downbeat was sort of a shuffle that goes with a dixieland beat. It was the second and fourth beat that I accented. [They were] doing the same thing with a banjo and guitar before I joined the band," he said, "but this was the closest they could get without drums. They couldn't get the gap between the accented beats without the drums. The time between the accented beats hasn't changed. It only sounds further between. What you hear *is* farther between."[38]

Wills liked the beat to be so solid that he often turned from the audience to face the band, and moved his bow up and down until everyone "got the rhythm."[39] This worried Dacus at first, because he felt he was not "getting it down where Bob wanted it," that the beat was not distinct enough. So he began to use the brush on the drums on the downbeat, one and three, and hit the case he carried his drums in with the handle end of his stick on two and four. "This gave a different tonal frequency. You could hear this tone frequency, and five thousand dancers could feel the beat." Wills loved it; and from that time, as long as Dacus was with the band, he "played the suitcase more than the drums." The Texas Playboys laughed and dubbed it the "suitcase rhythm."[40] Dacus said he looked like a jockey riding and whipping a horse, his left hand brushing the drums like stroking a horse's mane, his right hand whacking the case he was sitting on, every other beat. "I almost ignored one and three and never hit the suitcase on one and three," he said, adding, "You can take almost any kind of music and play a dixieland beat to it."[41] Subsequent drummers in the Wills band did not play the case like Dacus, but they all played the "suitcase rhythm" or two-four beat that became a Wills trademark.[42]

Musicians who could find a good deal to criticize in Wills's music never faulted his beat. Al Stricklin, for instance: "If there was a weakness anyplace it was not in his rhythm."[43] Ray DeGeer, who was with the band for nearly two years and later with Frankie Masters, Gene Krupa, Red Nichols, Charlie Barnet, and others, claimed it was "Bob's green thumb" that made Wills's music successful. "Bob, in my estimation, was never a much up-in-it musician," he explained. "But he had an uncanny sense of time and tempo. He couldn't count four beats to the bar. But he could set a tempo that appealed to dancers. In fact, he was the first man I ever heard who made breakdowns swing. I thought it was just a bunch of sawing on fiddles. By 'swing,' I mean it makes you want to dance. His music was not country music. . . . It swung on the dixieland side, it had a very New Orleans dixie

beat."[44] Sleepy Johnson, one of Wills's first rhythm men, was as puzzled as DeGeer concerning Wills's ability to create a swing tempo. Johnson saw a paradox: "Bob knows rhythm and doesn't play it. [He] had a different beat or different accent. Everyone had to play it after he introduced it at Crystal Springs. His rhythm section, not his fiddle, made him famous."[45]

If Johnson tended to overemphasize the importance of his own section of the band, he also had an insight into what made Wills tick musically and what made his music so popular. "I can't explain that [rhythm]. You played from inside out with Bob. You played with a feeling."[46] Without exception, every Texas Playboy I interviewed emphasized this point. Smokey Dacus expressed it best: "Bob's music included a great deal of improvising. I had more liberty with him than with anyone else I ever played with.[47] Bob's music would best be described as a form of jazz with an extraordinary amount of feeling. Bob couldn't tell you how he wanted it to feel, but when it felt right he knew it. . . . The extent to which Bob Wills relied and depended on feeling went completely outside the bounds of music. For the time . . . it was ridiculous to let feeling overshadow correctness." But Wills wanted it "to feel a certain way, and there was no other criteria. Nowadays they call it soul and do deliberately and intentionally what Bob would have done all the time. Only Bob Wills supposedly did it because he didn't know better. Bob had more feeling for what he wanted in 1935, and certainly he has since, as the people who play soul now. Wills knew what he was doing. He knew exactly how he wanted it to feel." Then Dacus added, "Bob Wills would not allow music to be put into a straitjacket. It did not have to conform to anything but human feeling."[48]

Members of the band felt their leader had an extra sense that allowed him to distinguish the music which fit that human feeling.[49] Dacus spoke of a "common or inborn feeling":

> I think everybody has it, but the reason it was never expressed before Bob Wills was the straitjacket would not allow it to be expressed. Bob would not allow any of his music to go in a straitjacket. And he couldn't care less how it was supposed to be, it was how it *felt*. . . . Bob Wills, when he was on the bandstand, he was the pulse of the audience, whether it was a thousand or five thousand. When it felt right to Bob, it felt right to all of them . . . all of us boys sitting on the bandstand, all the separate individual people, we were not playing to suit Bob. . . . We were playing to express ourselves. It was Bob Wills who was the narrow end of the funnel. We put our individual feelings into the open end of the funnel and Bob brought it all out on the other end.[50]

Dacus was mistaken, of course, in assuming that Wills was the first person in American music to break with formalism and rigid rules. Years before Wills was born, Negroes were singing their blues and playing their jazz with the same feeling and freedom. It was they who took American

music out of the straitjacket. *Jazz* and *musical liberation* are synonymous terms; ironically, Negroes began to liberate American music while they were still slaves.

No doubt Bob Wills played and loved jazz because of its liberating qualities.[51] Musically, he had a free, restless, and rebellious spirit—the same qualities inherent in jazz. Ray DeGeer speculated, "There was a freedom in jazz that appealed to Bob. If Bob had cut his teeth on a trumpet instead of a fiddle he would have been a jazz player. . . . His approach to breakdowns was more in the jazz field. . . . If he had been playing the trumpet he would have been a swinger." Smokey Dacus thought that it was the blues side of jazz that appealed to Wills. "The closer Bob got to the blues, the closer he expressed his insides. Bob's soul was literally crying all of the time because he could never get enough musical expression. Bob was never able to express himself completely in music." Dacus believed this was the reason Wills added horns. But even then, Dacus said, "he never fully pleased himself. He was always searching for more musical expression." DeGeer added, "Bob was a dreamer in this respect, he was always looking for something. I don't know whether he ever found it or not."[52]

It was this search for a more satisfying musical expression of his feeling that led to his famous "ah haa" and other cries. When he was very young, he had heard his father and grandfather, and perhaps others, cry out with similar folk expressions.[53] Wills's hollering while he and the band performed has been one of the most misunderstood aspects of his career. Some of his most admiring and loyal fans, knowing he occasionally drank too much, assumed he carried on in this manner because he had had too much to drink. Members of his bands all stated emphatically that this assumption was incorrect.[54] They also denied the assertion that Wills did this to cover up flat notes and poor music,[55] although they admitted he did have to clown when the band first arrived in Tulsa in order to conceal their errors. It was never mere show. Bob Wills, with a twinkle in his dark eyes and a broad smile on his face, explained, "When one of the boys, say Everett on the trumpet, played a chorus and hit a sound I liked, I hollered."[56] This ecstatic expression of deep feeling became part of the music itself. "Some of those 'ah haas,' " Smokey Dacus said, "you would swear never came out of a human. It just came out and moaned and molded into the music."[57] Wills injected this folk cry into all of his music, however, not just his folk music.[58] This bothered many musicians and critics, especially when it came to music that was otherwise as up to date as any of the age. Even in the late thirties, when many of his musicians were playing from written arrangements and playing a lot of ensemble scores, Wills still cried his "ah haas" and other sounds.[59] In his 1940 recording of "New San Antonio Rose," for example, there was nothing folkish about the song except that the original melody came out of an old fiddle tradition.[60] The

arrangement featured only reeds and brass, and the song was played in the popular swing style that all the big bands used at the time. Nevertheless, Wills cried out in the recording, "Ah haa, my San Antonio Rose!"

Wills's hollering and wisecracking came from two sources. His "ah haas" and elongated folk yells he learned as a very young boy. At the ranch dances in West Texas, his father, grandfather, and the cowboys, too, would give out with a loud cry if the spirit of the music (or the whiskey) so moved them. His wisecracking and talking to his musicians also came from his youth, from his relationship with black musicians who were constantly bantering while they performed. Their free and uninhibited spirit had been part of him since childhood; it was not something he adopted later. This early contact permanently marked his speech and personality as well as his music. Bob's musicians loved his hollering, talking, and urging them on as they sang and played. His fans loved it, too. Others tried this but failed because they were merely copying Wills; they did not feel it. It was as natural with Bob as with the blacks. After listening to some of the original 78s by Bob and his Texas Playboys, a *Rolling Stone* reviewer wrote, "Bob Wills' charm on those old records was his constant sparse rap through most every side. He'd give everybody in the band a bad time. Taunt, jive, jibe and joke.... Wills was the master. 'Women and children cryin' Willie, Willie' [a favorite Wills expression]." Bob Wills, he concluded, "sounded sort of like a white nigger running off at the mouth."[61] This reviewer caught one of the principal keys to Wills's success, that years before most musicians, Bob had discovered the appeal of undiluted black music and style.

Those hollers and expressions became an international Wills trademark.[62] Wills's greatest popularity came on the eve of and during World War II, at just the right time for servicemen to take his music and his folk expressions around the world. Many jokes derived from these, some of them downright pornographic. One incident concerned British and American pilots in England training for combat. The leader of the British squadron, as a signal to the other British pilots that he was beginning to go into his maneuver, called, "Tally ho!" Both the British and the Yankee pilots picked up his expression on their radios. When the Yanks were ready to follow the maneuver, their leader turned his aircraft and shouted, "Ah haa!"[63]

Though these expressions became a Wills trademark, they were never used simply for embellishment. They were added spontaneously, and only when Wills's musical spirit moved him. Fans certainly could not move him to holler. Bob did not like it when dancers came by the bandstand and called, "Holler, Bob!" He would act as though he had never heard them. On one such occasion, Bob turned to his saxophonist and said, "I ain't goin' to holler for no son-of-a-bitch."[64] Wills might go an entire night, or several

nights, without once hollering. Joe Ferguson, who joined the band in 1936, said he worried when Bob did not holler. It worried the whole band, because they knew that he never hollered until they "got it right in the groove."[65]

More formal and straitlaced musicians laughed at what they saw as crude antics. Their inhibitions never allowed them to understand and appreciate the freedom Wills enjoyed. While these few found it amusing, thousands more found it honest and appealing. Bob had the courage to be himself. He was willing to "correct" certain things, but his spirited style had fortunately been too well established in Fort Worth, Waco, and Tulsa for him to ever change it very much.

1. Eldon Shamblin; Jamie McIntosh; Bob Wills; Ruth Sheldon, *Hubbin' It: The Life of Bob Wills* (Tulsa: Privately published, 1938), pp. 124–125; Howard Turner.

2. June Whalin; Kermit Whalin; O. W. Mayo; Johnnie Lee Wills; Edna Wills; Glenn P. White, "Dave Edwards and His Alabama Boys," *Record Research,* No. 99 (July, 1969), p. 8.

3. Herman Arnspiger. Also Leon McAuliffe.

4. Jesse Ashlock; Jesse Ashlock (Ken Griffis interview); Ken Griffis, "The Jesse Ashlock Story," *JEMF Quarterly,* 8 (Autumn, 1972), 121–127; Bob Pinson, "The Musical Brownies," *Country Directory,* No. 4 (n.d.), p. 14; Jesse Ashlock to Bob Wills, Oct. 25, 1973. Ashlock told me he and Joe Venuti were good friends. Venuti was a marked influence on other fiddlers in Wills's band, especially Louis Tierney and Joe Holley. Also Edna Wills; Edna Wills, "What I Know."

5. Johnnie Lee Wills; Sleepy Johnson.

6. Leon McAuliffe. See "McAuliffe's Band to Crystal City," *Tulsa Daily World,* May 25, 1947; Russell Gideon, "Records, Movies Beckon Tulsa's Leon and Band," ibid., Oct. 24, 1948; "Leon McAuliffe to Be on KOTV," ibid., Nov. 27, 1949; " 'Take it Away, Leon. . . ,' " *Houston Post,* Jan. 27, 1974; June Whalin; Kermit Whalin; Bob Wills.

7. Leon McAuliffe.

8. Ibid.; Bob Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills.

9. Leon McAuliffe. Also Smokey Dacus; Ray DeGeer; Wayne Johnson.

10. Leon McAuliffe. Bob never seemed to consider the cost where better and newer music was concerned. Especially during his years in Tulsa, money was a means to better musical expression and never an end in itself. Betty Wills; Bob Wills; Smokey Dacus; Eldon Shamblin; Danny Alguire.

11. Sleepy Johnson; Al Stricklin; Edna Wills; Kermit Whalin; June Whalin; O. W. Mayo.

12. Al Stricklin.

13. Bob Wills to Alton Stricklin, Aug. 29, 1935.

14. Al Stricklin. Fred "Papa" Calhoun was the first pianist to ever play professionally with a western band. Calhoun played for Milton Brown, and Stricklin told me he went to hear Calhoun many times. Milton Brown and Fred Calhoun jointly deserve the honor of pioneering piano music in western swing. See Pinson, "Musical Brownies," pp. 13–19. Also Durwood Brown; Durwood Brown Scrapbook; Edna Wills Scrapbook; Kermit Whalin Scrapbook; Herman Arnspiger Scrapbook.

15. Bob Wills; O. W. Mayo; Johnnie Lee Wills; Edna Wills; Edna Wills, "What I Know"; Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* p. 125.

16. Bob Wills. Also Edna Wills; Edna Wills, "What I Know"; Kermit Whalin; June Whalin.

17. On a few occasions after 1945, Wills used only stringed instruments, not because he wanted it that way, but because he could not get suitable horn men on those occasions. Listen to Betty Wills; Bob Wills.

18. Edna Wills; Bob Wills.

19. Leon McAuliffe; Johnnie Lee Wills; Al Stricklin; Smokey Dacus; O. W. Mayo; Ray DeGeer.

20. Johnnie Lee Wills; Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* pp. 125–126. Also Bob Wills; Glenn Rhees; Edna Wills; Edna Wills, "What I Know."

21. Bob Healy, Bob Pinson, and Glenn P. White, "Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys: A Bio-Discography," *Record Research,* No. 79 (Oct., 1966), p. 4; Bob Wills. See also the biographical material on the 1935–36 Tulsa band in Al Stricklin Scrapbook; Joe Ferguson Scrapbook; Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook; June Whalin Scrapbook; Kermit Whalin Scrapbook; O. W. Mayo Scrapbook; Edna Wills Scrapbook; Glenn P. White Scrapbook. Bob Wills told me that Haines was a friend of Tommy Duncan and that Duncan suggested Haines as trombonist for the band.

22. Ray DeGeer.

23. Durwood Brown; Pinson, "Musical Brownies," pp. 13–19, especially the discography. Pinson said Brown once employed Iris Harper as saxophonist, though Durwood Brown claimed his brother never used horns. See also "Strictly by Ear," *Time,* Feb. 11, 1946, p. 50.

24. Woodie Wood; Johnnie Lee Wills; Ray DeGeer; Alex Brashear; Al Stricklin; Smokey Dacus.

25. "Strictly by Ear," p. 50. Also Bob Wills; Smokey Dacus; Woodie Wood.

26. McAuliffe told me he began to do this more after Art Haines left the band. Wills never employed many trombonists, so Leon continued to develop his imitation of the sounds of a tailgate trombone. The best example is "Let's Ride with Bob," Okeh 6692 (1942). Leon McAuliffe; Danny Alguire; and especially Neil Duer (trombonist for Wills in the early forties).

27. Jesse Ashlock.

28. Bob Healy, "The Light Crust Doughboys," *Country Directory,* No. 3 (n.d.), pp. 21–30, and "W. Lee O'Daniel and His Hillbilly Boys," *Country Directory,* No. 4 (n.d.), pp. 8–13. Also Kermit Whalin; June Whalin; Marvin Montgomery.

29. Durwood Brown. Roy Lee Brown did use drums with the Musical Brownies in 1947 (Pinson, "Musical Brownies," p. 19). Listen especially to Marvin Montgomery.

30. Listen especially to my interview with Rip Ramsey, who was with the band at the Opry in 1945. Also Bob Wills; Betty Wills; Joe Holley; Alex Brashear; Laura Lee Owens. The story has been told that Wills had to agree to hide his drums behind the curtain before the Opry officials would allow him to use them. According to Bob and Betty Wills and every musician I have interviewed who was present that night, the story is not true: the drums and horns were "out in the open."

31. Bob Wills. Also Leon McAuliffe; Smokey Dacus; Rip Ramsey; Jamie McIntosh; John McEuen; Tommy Allsup; Willie Nelson, "A Tribute to Bob Wills," *Country Music,* 2, no. 12 (Aug., 1974), 72–73.

32. Smokey Dacus. For an excellent discussion of Wills's rhythm section and beat, see Jim Downing, "Wills Brothers Together Again—Bob Back with Heavy Beat," *Tulsa Tribune,* Jan. 4, 1958.

33. Johnnie Lee Wills; Bob Wills. Some members of the band felt the Tulsa local was unfair and unkind to Wills and his musicians during their early years in Tulsa. Ironically, they said, the Wills organization later helped keep the union operating during those lean Depression years. The Fort Smith incident probably occurred about eighteen months after the band moved to Tulsa. Herman Arnspiger's first membership card in the local was dated August 7, 1935. On his first two membership cards for 1935, "Working Permit" was written above his name. Beginning January 11, 1936, these words no longer appeared on his union cards. See Herman Arnspiger Scrapbook.

34. Smokey Dacus.

35. Bob Wills.

36. Smokey Dacus. Also Ray DeGeer; Woodie Wood; Alex Brashear; Jamie McIntosh.

37. O. W. Mayo; Bob Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; Betty Wills; Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House; Joe Andrews.

38. Smokey Dacus.

39. Sleepy Johnson; Al Stricklin; Ray DeGeer; Smokey Dacus; Glenn Rhees; Keith Coleman; Joe Ferguson; Wayne Johnson.

40. Leon McAuliffe; Smokey Dacus; Al Stricklin; Sleepy Johnson.

41. Smokey Dacus.

42. Woodie Wood; George Balay; Danny Alguire; Bill C. Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.: A Fifty-Year History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), p. 181.

43. Al Stricklin. Also Wayne Johnson; Woodie Wood; Ray DeGeer; Alex Brashear; Danny Alguire; Jamie McIntosh; Kermit Whalin; June Whalin.

44. Ray DeGeer.

45. Sleepy Johnson. Kermit Whalin also identified Wills's rhythm as the principal reason for his success. Kermit Whalin; June Whalin; Danny Alguire.

46. Sleepy Johnson.

47. Smokey Dacus. Woodie Wood, Johnny Gimble, and other musicians who played with Wills also commented on the freedom within Wills's band. Also Neil Duer.

48. Smokey Dacus. Neil Duer remarked, "We played it like we felt it."

49. Eldon Shamblin; Joe Ferguson; Wayne Johnson; Sleepy Johnson; Leon McAuliffe; Danny Alguire; Keith Coleman; Joe Andrews.

50. Smokey Dacus.

51. Bob Wills.

52. Ray DeGeer; Wayne Johnson; Woodie Wood; Smokey Dacus; Leon McAuliffe; Jamie McIntosh.

53. Bob Wills; Bob Wills (Hank Penny interview); Son Lansford; Johnnie Lee Wills; Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House; Laverne Simmons Barnhill; Othel Stubb; Lawrence Hedrick; Dewitt Huffines; Ed House; Ruth House; Dan Gibson; John Luther Garner; June Whalin; Edna Wills; Kermit Whalin.

54. Leon McAuliffe; Smokey Dacus; Al Stricklin; June Whalin; Joe Andrews; Glenn Rhees. Also Sam Gibbs.

55. This erroneous explanation, which unfortunately has reached print several times, would not account for Wills's continuing to holler and talk after he hired better musicians. Listen to my comments regarding Wills's folk yells on *A Tribute to Bob,* United Artists SP-105, and on Charles Osgood's "News Break," CBS Radio Network, May 14, 1975.

56. Bob Wills; Leon McAuliffe; Ray DeGeer; Sleepy Johnson; Herman Arnspiger; Danny Alguire.

57. Smokey Dacus.

58. The only article I have seen that deals specifically with the folk expression Wills used in his music is Marguerite Macklin's excellent "Those Funny Noises Really Come Out of Bob Wills—We've Investigated," *Oklahoma City Advertiser,* Oct. 10, 1949. Macklin writes, "He makes a noise that is a cross between a yelp of exuberance over the way the boys play and a cry of a soul in mortal agony." I comment on this folk yell on *A Tribute to Bob.* See also Gloria Denko, "Descant: 'Aaaaaaaaa Haaaaaa' to Echo On," *Amarillo Sunday News-Globe,* Dec. 19, 1971.

59. Ray DeGeer; Eldon Shamblin; Whoopy McCray; Wayne Johnson; Woodie Wood; George Balay; Jamie McIntosh; Joe Ferguson; Kermit Whalin; Joe Holley; Alex Brashear; Laura Lee Owens.

60. Bob Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; Leon McAuliffe; Eldon Shamblin; Joe Ferguson.

61. See Dan Hicks's review of Merle Haggard and the Strangers, *A Tribute to the Best Damn Fiddle Player in the World (or, My Salute to Bob Wills),* Capitol ST 638, in *Rolling Stone,* No. 120 (Oct. 26, 1972), p. 60.

62. For an excellent discussion of Wills's folk cries, listen to Bob Wills (Hank Penny interview); Bob Wills; *A Tribute to Bob.*

63. Tulsa Indian artist Echohawk told me this anecdote, which an American pilot who was in the squadron had told him. Echohawk heard it from other servicemen in Europe also.

64. Glenn Rhees. Most fans never understood why Bob hollered. When the music was not "in the groove" and he was not hollering, the fans would dance by the bandstand and

say, "Let's hear an 'ah haa,' Bob." See also "Homecoming: Reflections on Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys, 1915–1973," my brochure notes to *For the Last Time,* United Artists UA-LA216-J2; and my comments on *A Tribute to Bob.*

65. Joe Ferguson; Smokey Dacus; Sleepy Johnson; Al Stricklin; Wayne Johnson; Leon McAuliffe; Herman Arnspiger; Danny Alguire; Glenn Rhees; Woodie Wood; Bob Lee; Eldon Shamblin; Jesse Ashlock.

9

"You Hired Bob Wills, Didn't You?"

> On Vocalion [Records], Mildred Bailey is ahead for the closing weeks of '36, but Bob Wills gets the nod for the entire year. . . .
>
> *Downbeat,* January, 1937

In 1935, Bob Wills got a chance to test his music before a much broader audience, an opportunity that ultimately took him out of the provincialism of the Southwest and made him a national musical figure. Arthur E. Satherley of the Brunswick Record Corporation (later part of Columbia) had approached him in the spring of 1935 and expressed interest in a recording contract. "Of course, we were not hard to deal with," Mayo said, "and we agreed on terms and set the date of the recording session for sometime later that year."[1] This forced Wills to get busy and hire more and better musicians, as detailed in the preceding chapter. By late August he had hired the last one he needed, Al Stricklin, and rehearsals went on until the nineteenth of September. On the twentieth they loaded into the "stretched-out Chevrolet bus" and one car and headed for Dallas. The band consisted of thirteen men and one woman: Bob Wills, violin; Tommy Duncan, vocalist; Johnnie Lee Wills, tenor banjo; Son Lansford, bass; Everett Stover, trumpet; Zeb McNally, saxophone and clarinet; Herman Arnspiger, guitar; Art Haines, trombone and violin; Jesse Ashlock, violin; Leon McAuliffe, steel guitar; Sleepy Johnson, guitar and tenor banjo; Smokey Dacus, drums; Al Stricklin, piano; and Ruth McMaster, violin and vocals.[2] Miss McMaster played on only one recording in this session, "Blue River." She was a concert violinist Wills had gone to for violin lessons, and she later became the second Mrs. Bob Wills. The thirteen men were western swing pioneers. They formed the nucleus from which Wills, in the next four or five years, would develop the best Texas Playboy band he ever had. Still, there were qualities in the group that went to Dallas in 1935 that no other Wills band ever had.[3]

Brunswick did not have a recording studio in Dallas at that time. According to O. W. Mayo, who went with the band to this first session, Arthur Satherley rented "an upstairs Buick building." Brunswick sent

recording engineers from New York with the necessary equipment. They hung burlap material on the walls to help soften the sound. The original "master" recordings were made on wax-based discs about an inch thick. In an effort to combat the Dallas heat, Satherley brought in fans and several hundred pounds of ice. On this occasion he put the ice in wooden barrels. When a disc was cut, the engineers evidently laid it on the ice, which some of the band members assumed was to keep the wax from melting and the recording grooves from running together.[4] The discs were shipped to the processing plant in the East in those barrels, though Satherley did not remember shipping the recordings on ice. "We made three 'takes' of each selection," he wrote, "and took our chances that at least one would be good."[5]

It is doubtful Brunswick knew exactly what they were getting in Wills. They probably thought they were getting a straight fiddle band. In fact, one of the first things Art Satherley told Wills was, "We do not want any horns." Wills responded, "I got along before I met you fellas, and I can still get along. I will either use horns, or I'm going back to Tulsa and will not record a thing."[6] Satherley was stunned. "All right, but they won't sell." An Englishman who loved American folk music and played an important role in perpetuating and popularizing it in this country,[7] Satherley obviously thought horns would take away from the purity of Wills's folk fiddle music. Brunswick, at that time, had its music in neat categories: they relegated most jazz and blues to "race records"; Wills they would put under "old time singing" or "string band." Actually, Wills was midway between string-band and race music, although Satherley and Brunswick never fully appreciated this. They were not prepared to accept the fact that Wills fell into neither category exactly, but had combined the two musics into one. It was musical heresy, and Satherley was critical of it. For a relationship that would last more than twelve years and sell millions of records, the beginning was precarious.

The argument over the horns was not the worst of it. Remarkably, Wills did not allow Satherley's criticism to cause him to "hang up" and fail to manifest his characteristic free and uninhibited style. Knowing the strained situation and how deeply conscious of criticism Wills was, one would have assumed that Wills, and consequently his band, would not have been themselves at their first recording session. Fortunately, they were never more themselves. When the session began, Wills did have the "propriety" to wait nearly a minute before he began to holler and talk to the band. Perhaps this was due to the nature of their first selection, "Osage Stomp,"[8] a piece they had learned from a race record entitled "Rukus Juice Shuffle."[9] It was so fast and difficult that Wills had to get the band into it before he could begin to have his usual fun. The first things he called were "Take it away, Jesse," and "It won't be long now." Then he hollered,

"Leon," and Leon took a chorus. He hollered at Zeb as "mama's little man." All this—and more—in the first record. Satherley began to squirm. In the next selection, "Get with It," the band did exactly that, and Wills gave out with an elongated folk holler. Art Satherley had obviously never heard anything like it. He rushed into the studio, stopped the music, and said, in as quiet a manner as an excited Englishman could, "Bob, you are going to have to hold it down some. When you talk, you're covering up the musicians." Leon McAuliffe said the band had never heard anyone so challenge Wills or ever attempt to hold him down before.[10] The boys nearly exploded trying to contain their laughter. "Is that right?" Bob asked. He turned to the band, white with anger. "Boys, pack up, we're going home." "No! No! Bob!" Satherley pleaded. "No! No!" Wills shot back, "You hired Bob Wills, didn't you?" "Why, yes," Satherley answered, somewhat puzzled. "By God!" Wills continued, "You want Bob Wills, you get Bob Wills, and I talk and sing and say what I want to when I feel like it." In his polite English manner Satherley explained, complained, and protested—and left it at that. Years later Bob's wife remembered that when Bob was recording something and not hollering, Art Satherley asked, "Where is your 'ah haa,' Bob?"[11]

After that confrontation, the recording session went off without further incident. They recorded twenty sides between September 21 and 24. This session, perhaps more than any other in Wills's career, brought together the two folk musics he had learned in his youth, frontier fiddle music and Negro music. Though the fiddles were used in nearly every selection, they were featured in four. Two of these, "Spanish Two Step," which he wrote in New Mexico in 1927, and "Maiden's Prayer," became all-time Wills favorites. The other two were "Oklahoma Rag" and "Black and Blue Rag." At least a dozen of the remaining sixteen selections were jazz, recorded in a dixieland style. They included "Osage Stomp," "St. Louis Blues," "Wang Wang Blues," "Sittin' on Top of the World," "I Ain't Got Nobody," and "Four or Five Times." "Wang Wang Blues" was pure New Orleans style. Most of the jazz they played in that session was a primitive jazz.

At a session on the twenty-fifth, Wills and Sleepy Johnson cut four fiddle tunes, "Smith's Reel" and "Harmony," both released on various labels of the American Record Corporation (a sister organization to Brunswick), also "Tulsa Waltz" and "Waltz in D." Wills, of course, played the fiddle, and Johnson played guitar. These recordings represent frontier fiddle music at its best. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, when the men who play this authentic folk music are getting scarce, one wishes Wills had recorded more of it. Wills himself regretted he had not left more of this music for posterity: "I didn't record a tenth of the tunes my own father and grandfather played."[12]

The records resulting from the 1935 session sold so well that in 1936 Satherley scheduled the band for another recording session, in Chicago, September 29 and 30. Wills chartered a railroad car for the band and a few friends for that trip. The band had changed very little since the Dallas session the year before. Unfortunately, Art Haines had gone on his own to organize the Ragtime Rascals in Shawnee, Oklahoma.[13] Wills never again had a trombone player quite like Haines. Son Lansford had also left the group to form his own band in Amarillo, the Sons of the West. Joe Ferguson replaced Lansford on bass and did vocals on the more pop and "straight stuff." A fine jazz saxophonist, Ray DeGeer, who joined the band in late 1935, was in this session. The session reflected how close Wills still was to New Orleans jazz. At least twenty of the thirty-one pieces recorded were jazz or race music.[14] They included "She's Killing Me," "Weary of the Same Ol' Stuff," "Basin Street Blues," "Trouble in Mind," "Sugar Blues," "Darktown Strutters' Ball," "Back Home Again in Indiana," "Fan It," "Bear Cat Mama," and "Swing Blues No. 2."

Though many of the records cut in this session sold very well, two turned out to be hits, "Steel Guitar Rag" and "Trouble in Mind." (Wills had wanted to record "Steel Guitar Rag" in the Dallas session, but Satherley vetoed it.) "Trouble in Mind," an all-time Wills favorite, was borrowed directly from black repertory of the 1920s.[15] Other versions, by Negro artists, could be found listed in Vocalion catalogs of the mid-thirties under "race records." Wills had good reason to adopt this kind of music. It was not just that blues and jazz fit Wills's free style. More functionally, race or jazz music was the dance music of the 1930s, as it had been in the 1920s. Since the big dance bands did not begin to make many records until about the time Wills did, in 1935, the category "race records (hot dance and blues)," as Brunswick referred to Negro music, was a likely source for Wills to find new (and old) selections for his own dance band.[16] The fact that many musicians looked on this music as "vulgar" did not bother him. Even before he was old enough to go to school, he had always felt a personal and, especially, a musical kinship with blacks. One night in Tulsa in the late thirties, in fact, he got drunk and hired a black trumpet player, but the trumpeter lasted only one night. When Bob sobered up, he decided Oklahoma was not ready for an integrated band, even if he was. Musically, Wills was color blind. As in so many other ways, he was ahead of his time in borrowing heavily from race music.[17]

By the time of the Chicago session, Art Satherley had realized that the uninhibited quality in the Bob Wills style should never be suppressed. In Chicago, in fact, the band got to swinging so well, the music was "down in the groove so deep" and the rhythm so solid, it caused technical problems for Brunswick's engineers. The rhythm section was so dominant and strong that it created a distortion and imbalance in the recordings. Sather-

ley was too wise to ask the boys to hold it down. He first tried to correct the situation by putting a rug under Al Stricklin's piano. Then he put another, but that still did not solve the problem. Al said, "Do you want me to play a little softer?" Satherley answered quickly, "Oh, no! You play just like you always do. Please don't change or hold it down at all. I will take care of the sound problem with these rugs." He finally added enough rugs to get the acoustics correct for the piano. "By then," Stricklin said, "he had me and the piano six inches off of the floor." Satherley then discovered Smokey Dacus was also coming across too well on the drums. He moved Dacus farther back in the studio. When that did not work, he moved him again, and again. Smokey finally played part of the session in the latrine at the back of the studio.[18]

Wills recorded fewer traditional fiddle selections in this session than in any other during his career. While one or two others might be considered in that category, the only clearly old-time tune was "Crippled Turkey," and it was never released. Violins were, of course, used in nearly all the thirty-one selections, but this session did not produce a distinguished piece of fiddle music. It is surprising that Satherley did not insist that more be included.

Evidently Wills and Satherley knew what they were doing, though, because Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys sold more records on Brunswick's Vocalion label in 1936 than any other recording artist or group. They outsold Louis Armstrong, Bix Beiderbecke, Fats Waller, Fletcher Henderson, Gene Autry, and other artists, some of whom had been established in the recording field since the 1920s.[19]

The success of Wills's record sales in 1936 prompted Brunswick to schedule him and the band for a recording session in Dallas beginning June 7, 1937. "Uncle Art" Satherley, as Bob and the boys were referring to him by then, Don Law, also of Brunswick Records, and Brunswick's engineers prepared another makeshift studio.[20] They began the session one night after Wills finished a dance in Fort Worth. It took three days to complete, and they recorded twenty-eight selections. Temperature and humidity were both high, even for Dallas. "It was very warm, no air conditioning or other present-day comforts. No complaints by Bob. He was used to playing in many places and drawing thousands of folk to dances as you know," Satherley recalled. "It was unbearably warm in our soundproof enclosure, and to make it of some comfort, I had four large bath tubs put in this enclosure and filled with large blocks of ice and also brought in large fans, blowing on the ice tubs which by the way were loaded with bottled beer for the boys. And by the way there were no visitors outside of our engineers and Don Law, my associate." However, not the ice and the fans and the beer were enough to cool Bob Wills, his Texas

Playboys, and Brunswick's recording crew. Satherley concluded in his delightful English way, "All present were working in their underwear. It was quite the thing to do under the circumstances."[21] Unfortunately, no pictures of that session have survived, if any were made.

The personnel in this underwear session were about the same as the Chicago session except for the addition of a third saxophonist, Tiny Mott. Because the jazz and "hot dance" recordings of the 1936 session had sold so very well, they recorded essentially the same sort of music in Dallas. Again, though the violins were generally used liberally, there was apparently not a single piece of frontier fiddle music. At least fifteen of the twenty-eight pieces were jazz. These included "White Heat," "Bleeding Hearted Blues," "Old Jelly Roll Blues," "I'm a Ding Dong Daddy," "Thirty First Street Blues," "Dallas Blues," "New St. Louis Blues," and "Oozlin' Daddy Blues." Again, the blues, jazz, hot dance, and race music dominated the repertory.[22]

In May, 1938, Wills and his Playboys returned to Dallas for one of their two recording sessions for Columbia that year. The Columbia Broadcasting System—Columbia Records was a CBS subsidiary—bought the Brunswick Record Corporation in February, 1938, acquiring the Vocalion label, on which Brunswick had issued most of Wills's recordings. The band that performed in the session for Columbia on May 16 and 17 numbered twelve: Wills and Ashlock, violins; Tommy Duncan, vocals; Sleepy Johnson, tenor banjo; Leon McAuliffe, steel guitar; Joe Ferguson, bass; Al Stricklin, piano; Everett Stover, trumpet; Zeb McNally, saxophone; and Smokey Dacus, drums. Ray DeGeer had left to play with swing bands in Chicago and was replaced on saxophone and trumpet by Charles Laughton. Eldon Shamblin joined the band in 1937 to play guitar. He was not only one of the best jazz guitarists Wills ever had, he also later wrote many arrangements for the band.[23]

As in their first session in Dallas in 1935, they recorded jazz, blues, and race music in this session. The initial selection, in fact, was a direct borrowing, "Black Rider." Charles Laughton opened it with a clarinet solo—unusual for the Wills style, which usually began with violins. From blues and jazz repertory they also recorded "Alexander's Ragtime Band," "Way Down upon the Swanee River," "Pray for the Lights to Go Out," and "I Wish I Could Shimmy like My Sister Kate." Wills often did vocal solos in his recording sessions. As he himself said, he was always at his best as a blues singer, and in this session his singing of a Bessie Smith favorite from the twenties, "Down Hearted Blues," was one of the best blues performances of his career.[24] Tommy Duncan did the vocals in the recording of another of Bessie Smith's hits from the 1920s, "Empty Bed Blues." Duncan was at *his* best in this session when he sang three Jimmie Rodgers hits, one a

novelty song called "Everybody Does It in Hawaii," and two from Rodgers's blues repertory, "Gambling Polka Dot Blues" and "Mississippi Delta Blues."

This Dallas session revealed a new trend. Wills was beginning to record selections that were slower, closer to pop music and Tin Pan Alley than they were to the primitive jazz and race music that dominated the sessions between 1935 and 1937. That this trend became a dominant factor in Wills's recordings in the early forties illustrates that Wills was never rigid in his musical distinctions. He was very flexible and, above all, eclectic. Decades after the Dallas session, a writer in the *New York Times* identified this key to Bob's enduring popularity: "Wills was . . . unafraid of using Tin Pan Alley–Broadway songs."[25] This probably reflected the influence of the big swing bands, such as those of Benny Goodman, Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, Duke Ellington, and Bob Crosby, who by 1938 were cooling their jazz and playing music with more popular lyrics. By the late thirties Wills looked on the big swing bands as the epitome of musical attainment and generally followed their lead. There were several examples of this influence in the May, 1938, session. Joe Ferguson sang "Don't Stop Loving Me" like any crooner. The influence was even more obvious in George and Ira Gershwin's "Oh, Lady Be Good" and in "Oh You Beautiful Doll" and "Moonlight and Roses," not to mention in a swing arrangement of the "William Tell Overture."[26] Two titles, recorded only two years apart, reveal something of the change: "Bear Cat Mama" (1936) and "Oh, Lady Be Good" (1938). The jazz was still there in 1938, but it had begun to cool and become more like the swing side of jazz.

By 1938, Columbia was listing Wills's records in the Vocalion catalogs under "folk music." Ironically, there was not a single old-time fiddle tune recorded in the May, 1938, session. Fiddles were used in nearly all the recordings, but any folk music recorded there represented the black tradition of blues and jazz.[27] In November of 1938, however, Wills had a field day recording fiddle tunes. In fact, he recorded more in three days than he had in all the sessions since 1935 combined. Evidently Satherley and Columbia had requested more fiddle music for the final 1938 session, held again in Dallas, November 28–30. Between the May and November sessions, Wills began to get these tunes ready. He rearranged the music he had written for "Spanish Two Step" into a new composition. It was the first selection recorded and was played in the same style Wills had learned down between the rivers from his father in West Texas. Art Satherley loved it. "Bob, what do you call it?" When Wills said he had not named the piece, Satherley suggested "San Antonio Rose."[28] The name stuck, and so did the tune. It sold very well. Wills recorded seven other fiddle tunes in this same session: "Carolina in the Morning," "Silver Bells," "Dreamy Eyes Waltz," "Beaumont Rag," "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star," "Prosperity Spe-

cial," and "Don't Let the Deal Go Down." Some of these selections were generations old and were handed down from fiddler to fiddler before Andrew Jackson went to the White House. From the standpoint of frontier fiddle music, this was Wills's most productive recording session. And in spite of all his other achievements and contributions to American music, the fiddle tunes he recorded in this and other sessions were what he would be best known and remembered for. In 1938 he still had thirty-five years of his career before him, and for every one of those thirty-five years, people would request some of the fiddle music he recorded in that November session.[29]

1. O. W. Mayo. Also Bob Wills. For a discussion of the relationship between the American Record Corporation, Brunswick Record Corporation, and Columbia Records, see John Godrich and Robert M. W. Dixon, *Blues & Gospel Records 1902–1942,* rev. ed. (London: Storyville Publications, 1969), pp. 15, 20, 22–24; and Arthur E. Satherley to me, Dec. 8, 1973.

2. For recording data, I relied initially on the Wills discographies in *Record Research* (1966–67) and *Journal of Country Music* (1973). Later I benefited from Bob Pinson's updated discography, included in this book (see his preface to the Discography for an account of those earlier works). I have also used the Columbia Records artist's cards for Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys for 1935–47. I am indebted to Martine McCarthy, Manager of Archives, CBS Records, for these cards as well as for other help on Wills's years with Columbia. Despite these excellent resources, an occasional detail or identification has remained unresolved; firm information on these points will be welcome.

3. Johnnie Lee Wills; Al Stricklin; Sleepy Johnson; Leon McAuliffe; Smokey Dacus.

4. O. W. Mayo; Al Stricklin; Bob Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; Smokey Dacus; Leon McAuliffe; Jesse Ashlock. See also O. W. Mayo to Glenn P. White, May 24, 1961.

5. Arthur E. Satherley; Satherley to me, Jan. 30, Feb. 4, 8, 1973. Listen also to Satherley's comments on *A Tribute to Bob,* United Artists SP-105.

6. Bob Wills; Leon McAuliffe, Smokey Dacus; Johnnie Lee Wills; Arthur E. Satherley. Listen to McAuliffe's comments on *A Tribute to Bob.*

7. "September Records," *Time,* Sept. 2, 1940, pp. 45–46. See especially Maurice Zolotow, "Hillbilly Boom," *Saturday Evening Post,* Feb. 12, 1944, pp. 22, 36–38, for a general survey of Satherley's activities in American music. In 1971 he was elected to the Country Music Hall of Fame for his contributions to country, western, and folk music. His contribution to race music has been impressive also, though it is rarely appreciated today. See also Ed Kahn, "Pioneer Recording Man: Uncle Art Satherley," in *Country Music Who's Who—1970,* ed. Thurston Moore (New York: Record World Publishing Co., 1970), pt. 7, pp. 12–13.

8. Listen especially to Wills's comments on "A Tribute to Bob," KBBQ, Burbank, Calif., Summer, 1970, and "A Tribute to Bob Wills," KBUC, San Antonio, Tex., Spring, 1973.

9. Sleepy Johnson; Johnnie Lee Wills; Leon McAuliffe; Durwood Brown; Kermit Whalin; June Whalin; Richard B. Allen.

10. Leon McAuliffe; Smokey Dacus. Listen especially to McAuliffe's discussion of this incident on *A Tribute to Bob.*

11. Betty Wills. Also Leon McAuliffe; Al Stricklin; Danny Alguire.

12. Bob Wills.

13. Bob Healy, Bob Pinson, and Glenn P. White, "Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys: A Bio-Discography," *Record Research,* No. 79 (Oct., 1966), p. 4. See Glenn P. White to Johnny Weiss (n.d.) and White's Questionnaire concerning Mr. Johnny Weiss and the Spade Cooley Band. I am grateful to White for making his file of questionnaires available for this study.

14. Some of this music was also listed under "hot dance" in Vocalion catalogs. Whenever

Wills's music was listed, the term *hot* was generally used—"hot string dance," "hot dance," "hot novelty dance." For a discussion of the categories Columbia put Wills and race music into, see "September Records."

15. "Trouble in Mind" was written by jazz artist and composer Richard M. Jones. I comment on Wills's use of this song on *A Tribute to Bob.* McAuliffe discusses "Steel Guitar Rag" on the same album.

16. See the Vocalion catalogs for Mar., July, 1935; Mar., Apr., May, Nov., 1936; Jan., Mar., May, Aug., Sept., 1937; Jan., Feb., May, July, Aug., Sept., Oct., 1938; Jan., Feb., Mar., Apr., June, July, Aug., 1939. See also Vocalion's complete catalog for everything released up to Sept. 20, 1939.

17. For the development of race music through rhythm-and-blues, rock-and-roll, and soul music, see Carl Belz, *The Story of Rock* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 20–23, 177–183. See also Tony Russell, *Blacks, Whites and Blues* (New York: Stein and Day, 1970), pp. 85–88.

18. Al Stricklin; Smokey Dacus.

19. "Hal Kemp Best on Brunswick," *Downbeat,* 4, no. 1 (Jan., 1937), 15. See also Chuck Suber to me, July 2, 1975.

20. Satherley to me, Feb. 4, 1973.

21. Ibid.

22. See the Vocalion catalogs for Mar., Apr., May, Nov., 1936; Jan., May, 1937; July, Aug., 1938; Jan., Apr., 1939.

23. Eldon Shamblin. Ruth Thomason noted in her "Journal of Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys, KVOO, 1940" that Shamblin joined the band on November 8, 1937 (see chap. 11, n. 16). See also "Okies Reverse Order of Steinbeck's Tale," *Metronome,* 57, no. 4 (Apr., 1941), 24; "Homecoming: Reflections on Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys, 1915–1973," my brochure notes to *For the Last Time,* United Artists UA-LA216-J2; Breton Littlehales, "The Playboys' Rhythm Stays a Little Longer," *Rolling Stone,* No. 171 (Oct. 10, 1974), p. 15.

24. "Down Hearted Blues," unissued Columbia master DAL 567. Wills had also recorded this selection in the 1937 Dallas session. Unfortunately, Columbia never released either of them. The John Edwards Memorial Foundation made copies available for this study.

25. Ivan Dove, "Records: Savoyards," *New York Times,* Oct. 3, 1973. Dove was referring to the recordings Wills made for Brunswick and Columbia between 1935 and 1947. Examples may be heard on *The Bob Wills Anthology,* Columbia KG 32416.

26. Additional examples are "Oh, You Pretty Woman," unissued Columbia master DAL 584, and "Little Red Head," Vocalion 04325. See also Glenn P. White to Joe Ferguson, May 1, 1963; and White's Questionnaire concerning Joe Ferguson with Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys.

27. In 1936, Vocalion listed Wills under "old time singing"; in 1937, as "novelty hot dance and string band" and "novelty hot dance, old time singing and playing"; in the spring of 1938, as "country dance and folk songs"; in Aug., 1938, under "hot string, novelty, country dance band and folk songs"; in Oct., 1938, under "hot string, novelty, country dance bands and folk music"; in Jan., 1939, as "novelty dance, country dance and folk songs." Vocalion sometimes listed Wills's music more specifically as "hot string band with singing."

28. Satherley to me, Feb. 4, 1973; Bob Wills.

29. According to Don Law of Columbia Records, the factory in Bridgeport, Connecticut, said that "the recordings in Dallas were the best they had ever heard from any studio. Of course, they mean technically." Law's report is cited in Francis Day, Southwestern Music Corporation, to Bob Wills, Jan. 6, 1939.

Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys in early 1934, about a month after they arrived in Tulsa. *Left to right:* O. W. Mayo, Son Lansford (guitar), Everett Stover (trumpet), Johnnie Lee Wills (tenor banjo), June Whalin (guitar), Bob Wills (fiddle), Tommy Duncan (vocals), Kermit Whalin (bass). *(Courtesy O. W. Mayo)*

Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys, about July, 1934. *Left to right:* O. W. Mayo, Son Lansford (bass), Herman Arnspiger (guitar), Johnnie Lee Wills (tenor banjo), Bob Wills (fiddle), Kermit Whalin (steel guitar), Tommy Duncan (vocals), Everett Stover (trumpet), Art Haines (fiddle), Zeb McNally (saxophone), June Whalin (guitar). *(Courtesy June and Kermit Whalin)*

Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys, 1934. *Front, left to right:* June Whalin, Johnnie Lee Wills, Bob Wills, Everett Stover, Kermit Whalin; *back:* Zeb McNally, O. W. Mayo, Tommy Duncan, Herman Arnspiger, Son Lansford, Art Haines. *(Courtesy Eloise Wills House)*

Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys, in the summer of 1935, as they prepare to fly to Waco, Texas, for a show and dance. *Left to right:* Johnnie Lee Wills, Smokey Dacus, Bob Wills, Tommy Duncan, Jesse Ashlock, Son Lansford, Sleepy Johnson, unidentified pilot, Leon McAuliffe, Zeb McNally, Art Haines. *(Courtesy Johnnie Lee Wills)*

Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys at the Tulsa State Fair, where they held their noon broadcast at the Play Boy flour booth, about 1937. *(Photo by Walter Madson, Tulsa; courtesy Johnnie Lee Wills)*

Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys with some Indian friends, summer of 1935. *Seated, left to right:* Jesse Ashlock, Johnnie Lee Wills, unidentified Indian, Honorary Chief Bob Wills, unidentified Indian, Tommy Duncan, unidentified woman and man; *standing:* Smokey Dacus, Herman Arnspiger, unidentified man, O. W. Mayo, Son Lansford, Leon McAuliffe, Zeb McNally, Art Haines, unidentified man. *(Courtesy Herman Arnspiger)*

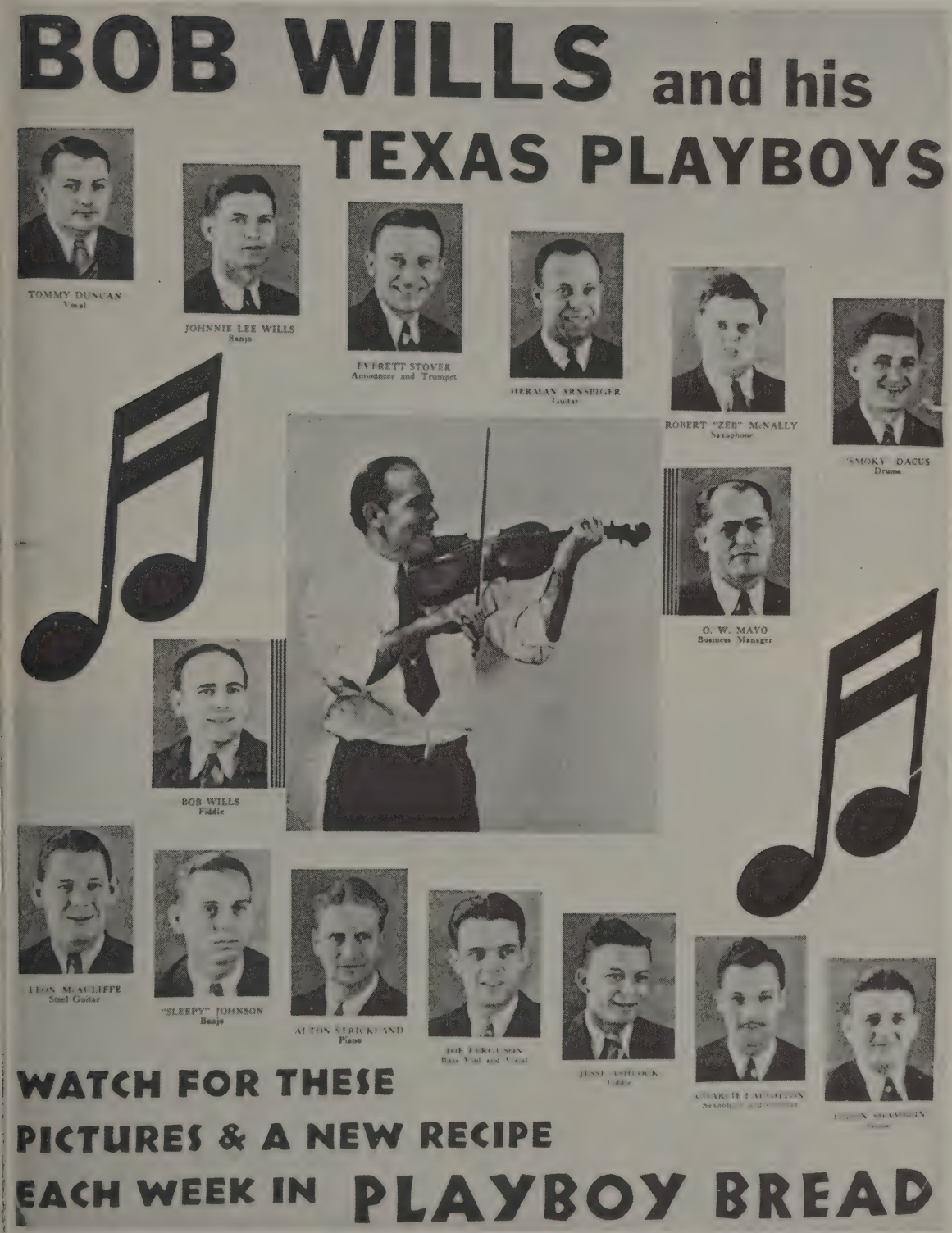
Bob Wills's buses number one and number two, 1937 or 1938. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

Panel truck used by the Wills organization for special events in the mid- to late 1930s. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys, summer of 1935. *Left to right:* Bob Wills (fiddle), Art Haines (trombone), John Wills (seated; fiddle), Zeb McNally (saxophone), Jesse Ashlock (fiddle), Sleepy Johnson (guitar), Leon McAuliffe (seated; steel guitar), Smokey Dacus (drums), Johnnie Lee Wills (tenor banjo), Herman Arnspiger (guitar), Son Lansford (bass), Tommy Duncan (piano), O. W. Mayo. *(Photo by Miller Photo, Tulsa; courtesy Ruby Wills Sullivan)*

Bob Wills and some of his Texas Playboys at an outdoor radio broadcast, 1936. *Left to right:* Herman Arnspiger (guitar), Bob Wills (fiddle), Sleepy Johnson (vocals), unidentified saxophonist, Tommy Duncan (vocals), Everett Stover (trumpet), Zeb McNally (saxophone), Joe Ferguson, unidentified guitarist. *(Courtesy Sleepy Johnson)*

Display of Play Boy flour and bread. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys at the Play Boy display at a fair in Oklahoma, 1936. *Front, left to right:* Leon McAuliffe, Herman Arnspiger, Son Lansford, Joe Ferguson, O. W. Mayo, Bob Wills; *back:* Everett Stover, Tommy Duncan, Al Stricklin, Zeb McNally, Sleepy Johnson, unidentified man, Smokey Dacus. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

Window card for advertising Play Boy flour and Play Boy bread in grocery stores. *(Courtesy O. W. Mayo)*

Bob Wills takes delivery of a new Hudson in Tulsa. *(Courtesy Ruby Wills Sullivan)*

Some Texas Playboys and children at "Children's Day" on the KVOO noon broadcast from Cain's Dancing Academy, mid-1930s. *(Courtesy Al Stricklin)*

10

Here Comes de Judge

In the bus we had rules. Twelve of us, we wrestled and played. Judge McNally would settle our disputes. It was a fun thing.
Leon McAuliffe

Boys, the Judge has been reelected again.
Bob Wills

Musical freedom characterized not only Wills himself, but his whole band as well. There was a spirit of sheer fun that the musicians manifested that one can appreciate only by listening to their old 78s.[1] Every member of the band interviewed mentioned the remarkable freedom that each had to express himself musically. The wilder and more innovative he was on the choruses, the better Bob liked it. Ray DeGeer said, "Actually, Bob wanted a man to play something spectacular every time he played." Wills once proudly remarked, "When I give Al [Stricklin] the chorus, it's just like winding up a toy and turning it loose. You didn't know which direction it would go."[2] Joe Ferguson summed up the spirit of the whole band and explained, to a large extent, why the band was so very popular: "Everybody had fun. There were no hangups in the band."[3]

Wills, of course, wanted his music to both feel right and be musically right. He worked to develop both, but he never sacrificed feeling because others believed something else was correct or more generally accepted. "Our music was completely unsophisticated and uninhibited," Ray DeGeer said. "Musically speaking, you could cut the band to ribbons. There were many, many bands that played cleaner and musically better. But they didn't have the spark." DeGeer observed that others took Wills's music, even used his style, played it "musically better than Wills did, but were not as successful" because they did not have the spirit. "I think the uninhibited aspect had to do with [Bob's] success," DeGeer continued. "It gave it life. Everybody had himself turned on. When you organize a unit as a unit you have to cut the better men down to the lesser men. In Bob's band every

man did his best all the time. It was a soul music expression. In Bob's band, although it was a unit and you were striving to please Bob, he encouraged individualism. He didn't want Jesse to sound like him or someone else to sound like another musician."[4]

The members of the 1930s band believed that another reason the band was so popular and successful stemmed from their playing together so long: there was a closeness among the musicians in that group that never existed in any other Wills band. Leon McAuliffe, who was in that band from 1935 through 1942, remarked, "You were completely free to be yourselves. There were no hangups at all. There was a *happiness* and *freedom* in that band that came across to the audience."[5] McAuliffe added, "I never experienced this in my own band. I had a band for nineteen years after I left Bob. Smokey [Dacus] and.I have talked about it. Actually there was a team spirit within Bob's band that I've never seen in any other group. I've never seen it closely approached in any other professional group."[6] Dacus agreed. "We played together so much and we got to know the feelings of fellow musicians. For example, I played drums, and over here was Joe Ferguson on the bass. Joe could be playing along on a tune, and he would want to express something. I would feel it in Joe, and so when he would be playing along and put in something, I would play it right along with him—because I knew that was the way he was going to play it, I knew his feelings. We felt each other," Dacus said. "It would have been impossible if we had been reading [music]."[7] Wayne Johnson, who played saxophone and clarinet for Ben Pollack and others before joining Wills's band in the late thirties, said, "I never played in another band like it. We played together so much as a team, and there was so much cooperation in the band that every man played every other musician's instrument as he played his own."[8]

Much of the fun took place when Wills gave an individual a chorus to improvise. "Improvisation [was] based on however your improvisational mind happened to run," Ray DeGeer explained:

> Bob never suggested on this. This was left up to your personal taste. It was basically intended to be jazz improvisation. This was the method of discriminating whether a guy was really a good player or not. If he could improvise, he was a little better than the average player, because we took it for granted that anybody could learn the melody of a tune. Melody players just weren't at any premium. You could find thousands of guys who could play the melody. But people who could improvise were something else. This included all instruments, violins or anything else.[9]

Sleepy Johnson agreed: "You would not have lasted three days with Bob if you couldn't play hokum or improvise."[10]

Jazz choruses were more than a test of the musician, however; that was where the Texas Playboys had fun. Smokey Dacus: "My enjoyment was in

making a man play over his head. I used to hope Bob would have Al take the chorus. When he did, we could do anything we wanted to do with it. Eldon and I would play beat for beat with each other and ease under Al, and he would play over his head." Dacus played with these men so much he knew how to make them play over their heads. "Anytime it came to Al," he said, "I had two little bitty cymbals. I would use a brush and one stick instead of the suitcase. What I wanted behind Al was something very crisp, nothing hanging over. I had another way of playing for Leon. Stover on trumpet—here was a sharp instrument—I would go to the suitcase. For Judge on the saxophone I would go to the suitcase. I had a certain pattern for each man."[11]

Dacus, like his colleagues, tried to bring out the best in his fellow musicians. Not only did this provide fun and improve the music, it also pleased Wills and the audience. There was, of course, a practical consideration, as Leon McAuliffe pointed out: "Economics had a great deal to do with our music. Let's face it—it was the best job I'd ever had, and the same was true with the other guys. You didn't know, it was the day of the breadlines."[12]

Another reason for the band's success was the sheer enjoyment they received from playing: it did not seem like work. This attitude is incredible, considering their work schedule. They played four nights a week on the road and two nights at Cain's Dancing Academy in Tulsa, in addition to six radio broadcasts a week. It was even worse than this outline indicates. Wills tried to play music that would keep people coming to his dances and keep them dancing after they got there. The band therefore never took an intermission at a dance. While one musician rested, the others played on. Wills formed the habit early in his career of playing each selection completely through once and then, after a count of four, playing it through again. He first did this at Crystal Springs in Fort Worth, because the band did not know enough different selections to play for a whole evening of dancing, generally at least four hours.[13] Even after the Tulsa band had a repertory of several hundred selections, Wills continued the procedure. He found it kept people dancing. It also kept them from consuming too much alcohol and engaging in fisticuffs.[14]

It was a strenuous life at best. Often it was several hundred miles between dances. Despite the traumatic travel, the Playboys always enjoyed playing when they got there. "At no time did we dread to go on the bandstand," Dacus said. "When we played Medicine Park, we always stayed all night there at the lodge and left our instruments on the bandstand after the dance. The next morning after breakfast we would go in and play just for our own enjoyment until three or four in the afternoon and go on to Oklahoma City that night." He added that there was "always more satisfaction and more entertainment on the bandstand on any given night than

there ever was on the dance floor. It got to be a case of we sat there and literally read each other's feelings, read each other's minds all night."[15] Their music was a dialogue between them. McAuliffe said, "It was a fun thing. I've never been with another team or another group or unit that had this kind of spirit. It was constant all the time. When the song got to going right, when the suitcase rhythm was right, no one was left out." It was "not just at dances, broadcasts, or rehearsals. In the car, in the cafe, it was always there, this spirit."[16] Such talk coming from high school or college musicians could be dismissed as so much school spirit. But the Playboys were in their mid-fifties to late sixties when they were interviewed for this study. A writer could never capture on paper the gleam in their eyes and the warmth in their voices when they recalled those years.

It is fortunate the Playboys held the attitude they did, because Wills worked them very hard and very long every day except Sunday, and sometimes even on Sunday. It was a case of practice nearly every day, broadcasts six days a week, and dances six nights a week. Moreover, when it came to work on the bandstand, Wills, like his father and grandfather, was a strict disciplinarian. The discipline was something over and above what they got in practice at rehearsals. The discipline did not come, as one might expect, because Wills demanded they play any certain way.[17] There was too much musical freedom in the band for that. Ironically, it came from the complete opposite. Because Wills's style was so free and uninhibited, his musicians never knew what to expect and always had to be ready to do the unexpected. Wills said frankly, "I did this to keep them on their toes, to keep them sharp, alert, and awake."[18] He would go through half a night of dancing and never once announce what the next tune would be. Eldon Shamblin said they just had to learn what it was going to be by the way Wills moved his body or held his bow, and they often had to pick up the tune after he started it.[19]

The principal means Wills used in disciplining his band, however, was the uncertainty regarding who would take the choruses.[20] He might have a hit record in which the trumpet got the first chorus. One would assume that in personal appearances he would try to make the performance sound like the recording the audience was accustomed to hearing. But he was never bound even by his own recording and might give the chorus to Zeb McNally on saxophone or Jesse Ashlock on fiddle.

Al Stricklin compared Wills to a modern-day quarterback in professional football. "You have heard the expression 'audibles called at the line of scrimmage.' Now, Bob called audibles at the line of scrimmage. Now, you couldn't outguess him. You couldn't say, 'Now the trumpet player will get the break on this one, and then the clarinet player will get this break; I'll smile at the girls, especially that one—I may want to take her out.' Musicians have such thoughts." Stricklin learned this the painful way. "Bob

pointed that bow at me, and I was looking off. Tommy Duncan walked over and said, 'Al, you will be riding to Oklahoma City tomorrow with Bob. He hasn't said it yet, but you will.' I got to thinking. I knew I had done something wrong—but wasn't sure what it was. Sure enough, Bob said, 'Al, you ride with me today.' " As they drove along Wills finally said, "Kid, normally I don't even discuss this with my boys, because I don't think you meant anything by it. I'm going to say this to you real nice, but don't you ever let me catch you looking off again when I point that fiddle bow at you and say, 'Take it away.' This band is built on precision and loyalty and being ready and working hard and working to me. And I don't care how pretty that girl out there is and how much you want to get with her. Never look off of the bandstand again. Then I remembered the lull," Stricklin said. "*Audibles at the line of scrimmage.* Bob thought Al would sound good at that point. I never saw the keyboard again after that as long as I played for him. I kept my eyes on Bob."[21]

Leon McAuliffe concurred. After seven years in the band, hundreds of dances, and more than two hundred recordings, he never knew what Bob would do. "You never knew when you would get a chorus. You played with one eye on Bob and the other on the people. You just kept looking all the time. You really stayed alert. Bob might have his back to you and wheel and say, 'Take it away, Leon.' " About taking the chorus, McAuliffe said Wills told him, "You smile at me when you take it and smile when you give it back and play like hell in the meantime."[22]

Rather than resenting Wills's discipline and unpredictability, the Playboys thought it added to the pleasure of playing in the band. Without exception, every former member of the band said that whenever they began a dance without Wills, as soon as he came on the bandstand the music was mysteriously better. Aside from his musical ability—he did not even have to play—his mere presence seemed to do something to both the musicians and the dancers. Fans claimed they could close their eyes and tell by listening to the music whether or not he was there.[23] One is at first tempted to attribute this to Wills's discipline, or to the fact that times were hard and his musicians were afraid of losing their jobs.[24] Certainly these factors were important. But the musicians themselves thought there was more to it than they could explain: Wills had charisma. Eldon Shamblin, who played with Wills in both the pre- and postwar bands, said, "Bob had a good band, but just a band. Without him it was just a band; it lost its spirit. You put forth five times as much effort without him and accomplished nothing. He was the link between you and the audience. He was a hard driver all right, but he made you want to do it—that was it."[25] Leon McAuliffe said that Wills's presence made "all the difference in the world." After studying Wills for years, he concluded: "Bob had the ability to control a crowd with mass hypnotism, I feel. He can walk on the stage—he

doesn't have to play or sing or do a thing. He has a mannerism of walking on a stage and looking at the crowd, and they are his." McAuliffe noted that they could play their best, but Wills's presence was the inspiration that made the difference. "He had the ability to make you want to do your utmost for him. No fear, he just inspired you to this point. He could just look at you and smile, and it was like turning a spotlight on you." Wayne Johnson remarked, "When you went to the microphone and played a chorus and Bob put his arm around you and talked to you, the horn played itself."[26]

Danny Alguire, a trumpeter in the band in the early forties, said, "The secret to Bob Wills's band was Bob Wills. Bob had a way of yelling and urging you on. You didn't play to the people; you played to Bob Wills, and Bob sold you. The people loved Bob Wills, and anything he sold them, that was good, they believed it. You kept one eye on Bob and played to him. Bob wanted to be part of your playing. You didn't stand before the mike and face out. You kind of three-fourths faced the crowd, and one-fourth faced Bob. Because Bob had a way, he wanted to stand there with you and holler between or something. That was his way of selling you. If you were a lousy singer, he would make you sound good because he had a way of projecting you or selling you."[27]

Playing in the Wills band also proved exciting because the band members were, of necessity, innovative and original, both collectively and individually. As pioneer musicians, most of them were the first, or among the first, to play their particular instruments in that kind of band. They had to adapt to the new music Wills had developed by combining jazz and swing with rural folk music. Wills did not try to impose a style on these men.[28] That would have been presumptuous on his part; after all, it was often as new to him as it was to them. He advised only that they be themselves. He told Al Stricklin to "never copy anyone." While Stricklin continued to play jazz, he set the piano style for subsequent western bands.[29] Smokey Dacus was the first drummer for such music. Leon McAuliffe had seen only one man play an amplified steel guitar before he began playing for Wills—Bob Dunn, the jazz steel guitarist with Milton Brown's band in Fort Worth. McAuliffe said he could never match the jazz Dunn played; he developed a style of his own, usually playing melody even when he took a chorus. He was fortunate enough to come at a time that allowed him to set a precedent. McAuliffe explained his success as a guitarist: "You see, I didn't have to listen to anybody. Bob just said, 'Play, Leon.' I played what I felt and knew." Later, other guitarists felt they had to sound like him. McAuliffe believed too many of Wills's guitarists, though, "better musicians than I, . . . played that way, but didn't feel that way." McAuliffe speculated they "didn't feel the freedom that I had. I was only playing what I felt."[30]

This experimental spirit led Wills to give his guitars new importance. By 1935, McAuliffe was a featured artist, using his steel guitar as a melodic instrument and performing jazz choruses.[31] He held his own and shared the front line with trumpets, trombones, and violins, and in 1937 he began to share the front-line spotlight with fellow guitarist Eldon Shamblin.[32]

Shamblin also helped make the guitar an important component of the Wills style. He typified the first-rate, sophisticated musicians Bob was employing.[33] Before joining the Texas Playboys, on November 8, 1937, he had been a session player at CBS. "Then Bob offered me this job," Eldon said. "Everyone thought I was crazy to take it. Throwing away a career."[34] Shamblin had played with more orthodox swing bands, strictly in the jazz and swing-band tradition. Though he never really departed from that style, he, McAuliffe, and other Wills guitarists went beyond their swing-band counterparts and helped make guitars more than mere rhythmic servants. By the mid- or late thirties they had transformed them into front-line instruments, combined them into guitar ensembles, and were performing on a level with violins, saxophones, and trumpets.

Wills's early guitarists deserve more credit for their pioneer efforts than the meager praise a few writers have grudgingly given them. Most writers have tended to overemphasize the influence on them of Django Reinhardt and Charlie Christian and thereby overlook the innovativeness and creativity of Shamblin and McAuliffe. Actually, Eddie Lang had more influence than either Reinhardt or Christian.[35] By 1937, however, Shamblin and, especially, McAuliffe had changed their performing technique and had made the guitar's role far more imposing than Lang, even with all his brilliance and ingenuity, would have dreamed.

Taking Shamblin out of country tradition and putting him into jazz tradition, a recent writer noted, with correct emphasis, that Shamblin's guitar "owes more to Christian and Reinhardt than to, say, the Carter Family or Riley Puckett."[36] However, he made Shamblin the imitator rather than the innovator. Shamblin's style had already matured before he heard Christian. Charlie did not make any records until late in 1939; Shamblin recorded with Wills in the spring of 1938. Since Christian was playing in Oklahoma City at the very time Shamblin and McAuliffe were experimenting with guitar styles and helping make the instrument more significant in a popular dance band, it is just as possible that Christian learned a great deal in those years from listening to Wills's guitarists, especially Eldon Shamblin, over KVOO and on recordings. In pointing out the similarity between Christian's and Shamblin's styles, a writer in *Metronome* in 1941 not only put Shamblin in the jazz tradition, he also gave him the highest praise he could bestow on a guitarist by acknowledging that he came "closer than any other white plectrist to getting the solidity and swing and steady flow of ideas of Charlie Christian."[37] Like most jazz

and swing guitarists, Eldon learned from Christian—but later; this does not explain why their styles were so similar by late 1940 or early 1941 (not too long after Christian became famous). One thing *is* certain—Shamblin, McAuliffe, and other Wills plectrists, along with Charlie Christian, were among the early musicians who broke away from traditional guitar styles and helped make the guitar more widely popular in American music.

Four decades after he joined Wills, Shamblin still sounded so modern that *Rolling Stone* could observe that he played "the world's best rhythm guitar."[38] Though some would question such a claim, there is little doubt that Wills was years ahead of his time in the mid- and late thirties, when he began using guitars as a front line—one reason his music, also, still sounded modern nearly forty years later.[39]

To different degrees, *all* members of the band pioneered the use of their instruments in Wills's music. This was true of horns as well as strings. Because there were so few examples to follow, they made mistakes, but above all they were free to express themselves in their music.

One very important reason Wills's music was successful was the cordiality that permeated the band. On or off the bandstand, they were a team and had fun being together. On the bandstand, Smokey Dacus remarked, "Each man tried to make the other man sound better." Off the bandstand, each man tried to beat the other in those "crap games that you could never break up. You asked Mr. Mayo for more money and the game went on." Every other member of the band shared Smokey's sentiments. "We found happiness in each other. We were together nearly sixteen to eighteen hours a day." Dacus reflected, with a note of nostalgia in his voice, "We did not realize how much of life we really had a hold of."[40]

A great deal of this camaraderie was due to Wills's own knowledge of human nature. Realizing that relations between band members had to be good or the music and the whole band would suffer, he insisted that a "man *fit.*" Ray DeGeer accounted for the fun the band had: "I found soon after I joined Bob that Bob wouldn't tolerate otherwise. [He] loved a good musician, but he wouldn't tolerate a good musician just for the sake of him being a good musician. He would quickly settle for a lesser musician that fit the slot. For him, fitting the band was the prime requisite. Your attitude, though no great to-do was made about that, but your attitude had a lot to do with it. Your cooperation and how you got along with the guys." DeGeer added, "I was called in a couple of times for losing my temper, et cetera."[41] Johnnie Lee Wills similarly said that his brother hired "men, not just musicians."[42]

Though Wills insisted on men who "fit," the remarkable thing is that he rarely ever bothered seeing to it that men *did* fit his band. This he left to Zeb "Judge" McNally. Shortly after Zeb joined the band in 1934, Bob appointed him to handle all disciplinary problems that arose. If there was a

disagreement the boys could not settle, they would take it to Judge McNally, who "laid down the law."[43] "Judge McNally was probably the most fair and classic expression of Bob's understanding of people. We didn't know it then. We saw only the funny side."[44] What could have been serious problems, damaging to the band and the music, became fun, because the Playboys never knew what kind of erratic decision Judge would hand down. Leon McAuliffe smiled as he thought about the fun they had. "In the bus we had rules. Twelve of us, we wrestled and played. Judge McNally would settle our disputes. It was a fun thing."[45]

Of the many Judge McNally stories, one of the most interesting concerns the horse collars. Wills had two Buick sedans (or "buses") in which the band was then traveling. "Number one" and "number two," they were called. The boys traveled so much they were always looking for some way to make it more comfortable. They established rules concerning where on the backs of the seats they could put their arms. A person could not infringe on any area of the back of his seat, and often an arm dropped behind the seat got a sound smashing. This was all in fun. But after the fun was over, it was difficult to sleep on the long trips home. As the buses moved along, heads flopped from side to side and back and forth over the top of the seat, and a crick in the neck was often the result. Smokey Dacus and Al Stricklin saw some horse collars in a store in Enid, Oklahoma, and decided they would be perfect to solve the floppy-neck situation on the bus. The other fellows laughed at them when they put these things around their necks and got in the bus. However, Al and Smokey soon found the collars were ideal and even served as pillows. A few nights later, leaving Wellington, Kansas, after playing a dance, Smokey Dacus went over to bus number one, only to discover his horse collar was gone. He went over to bus number two, and there sat Leon McAuliffe with Dacus's horse collar around his neck. McAuliffe stood over six feet and weighed nearly two hundred pounds. Dacus was a little guy. "I was not big enough to take it," he said, "and we didn't do things that way." When McAuliffe refused to give up the horse collar, Dacus wisely decided to handle it "legally," through the Judge. When they stopped to eat about thirty miles down the road, Smokey said, "Judge, I have a complaint against that no-good steel guitar player Leon McAuliffe. He stole my horse collar." Judge McNally put on his legal decorum and called the court to order. The Judge asked Dacus to explain his indictment and then asked McAuliffe to answer the charges. McAuliffe said that he had not been getting any sleep and that Dacus had acted selfishly in "not sharing his horse collar." "Mr. McAuliffe," Judge McNally said, "did you ask him for it?" Leon started to reply, "No! Ah, . . ." when Judge stopped him, told him the seriousness of his offense, and hollered across the cafe, "Mayo, fine McAuliffe twenty-five dollars." McAuliffe pleaded and whined, but the fine stuck. Mayo held

twenty-five dollars out of McAuliffe's pay. Leon went to Wills, but the fine stuck.[46]

Judge McNally had bad spells, during which he was more unpredictable and irritable than usual. Two weeks after the horse collar incident, a Playboy "might have gone to him with a complaint, and he would fine [him] ten dollars for complaining."[47] He even fined Bob Wills. Wills would protest, but McNally was adamant. The boys would go to Wills and tell him Judge had to be impeached. Wills would take the Judge to the back of the bus, have a talk with him, and come back and announce, "Judge has been reelected." At times the boys complained that the Judge was not hard enough on Bob Wills. Johnnie Lee Wills joked, "We always thought Judge was a crooked judge but could never prove it."[48] When their complaints about his leniency toward Bob became severe, "Bob took Judge to the back of the bus and, I think, bribed him." Then Wills and the Judge would come back, and Bob would say, "Boys, the Judge has been reelected again."[49] Dacus concluded, "Bob knew we enjoyed the unpredictableness of Judge, and it was the test of a man. If a man could not go along with the decisions and the fun of it all, he did not fit the Wills organization."[50]

1. Of the twenty-four selections reissued in the two-record set *The Bob Wills Anthology,* Columbia KG 32416, twenty-two were made between 1935 and 1941 by the band referred to here. See also Dan Hicks's review of *A Tribute to the Best Damn Fiddle Player in the World (or, My Salute to Bob Wills)* by Merle Haggard and the Strangers, Capitol ST 638, in *Rolling Stone,* No. 120 (Oct. 26, 1972), p. 60.

2. Bob Wills; Ray DeGeer; Al Stricklin; Danny Alguire.

3. Joe Ferguson; Smokey Dacus; Ray DeGeer; Leon McAuliffe; Jesse Ashlock; Jamie McIntosh; Wayne Johnson; Woodie Wood; Eldon Shamblin; Claude "Whoopy" McCray; Al Stricklin; Johnnie Lee Wills; Billy Jack Wills; Neil Duer.

4. Ray DeGeer.

5. Leon McAuliffe (italics mine); Al Stricklin; Johnnie Lee Wills; Joe Ferguson; Johnny Gimble.

6. Leon McAuliffe. Woodie Wood said he had been in many bands, but never in one that had the unity and teamwork of Wills's band; never forced, it came simply because the musicians felt that way about the band and the music.

7. Smokey Dacus; Joe Ferguson; Eldon Shamblin; Al Stricklin; Leon McAuliffe.

8. Wayne Johnson; Smokey Dacus; Ray DeGeer; Joe Ferguson; Neil Duer; Danny Alguire.

9. Ray DeGeer.

10. Sleepy Johnson. Also June Whalin; Kermit Whalin; Jerry Zolten, "Western Swingtime Music: A Cool Breeze in the American Desert," *Sing Out!,* 23, no. 2 (May–June, 1974), 3.

11. Smokey Dacus; Howard Turner; Ruth Sheldon Knowles.

12. Leon McAuliffe.

13. Durwood Brown; Johnnie Lee Wills; Sleepy Johnson; Jesse Ashlock; Bob Wills.

14. Johnnie Lee Wills; Bob Wills; Son Lansford.

15. Smokey Dacus; Wayne Johnson.

16. Leon McAuliffe.

17. Ray DeGeer; Leon McAuliffe; Al Stricklin; Bob Wills.

18. Bob Wills.

19. Eldon Shamblin; Al Stricklin; Joe Ferguson. Listen to my tape of the rehearsal at the Wills home in Fort Worth, Dec. 2, 1973; and Shamblin's comments on *A Tribute to Bob,* United Artists SP-105. See also my brochure notes to *For the Last Time,* United Artists UA-LA216-J2, entitled "Homecoming: Reflections on Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys, 1915–1973."

20. Johnnie Lee Wills; Al Stricklin; Leon McAuliffe; Bob Wills; Johnny Gimble; Laura Lee Owens.

21. Al Stricklin.

22. Leon McAuliffe. Listen also to Leon's delightful reference to this uncertainty on *A Tribute to Bob.*

23. Donald C. Townsend; Don Dennis; Winston Dennis; Glenn P. White.

24. Leon McAuliffe thought this was a factor, but not the main reason.

25. Eldon Shamblin; Joe Ferguson; Woodie Wood; Wayne Johnson.

26. Leon McAuliffe; Wayne Johnson; Sleepy Johnson; Leon Rausch.

27. Danny Alguire; Leon McAuliffe.

28. Bob Wills; Ray DeGeer; Smokey Dacus; Neil Duer.

29. Leon McAuliffe; Smokey Dacus; Al Stricklin. See also Townsend, "Homecoming."

30. Leon McAuliffe. Also Smokey Dacus; Al Stricklin; Woodie Wood; Johnny Gimble; Townsend, "Homecoming."

31. Listen, e.g., to "Steel Guitar Rag" (1936) and "Steel Guitar Stomp" (1937).

32. E.g., "Bob Wills Special" (1940) and "Twin Guitar Special" (1941).

33. Townsend, "Homecoming."

34. Breton Littlehales, "The Playboys' Rhythm Stays a Little Longer," *Rolling Stone,* No. 171 (Oct. 10, 1974), p. 14. See also Richard Lieberson, "Western Swing Lives On in Eldon Shamblin," *Guitar Player,* 9, no. 4 (Apr., 1975), 12, 28, 30, 35–37.

35. Eldon Shamblin; Sleepy Johnson; Herman Arnspiger; Durwood Brown; Leon McAuliffe.

36. Littlehales, "Playboys' Rhythm," p. 15.

37. "Okies Reverse Order of Steinbeck's Tale," *Metronome,* 57, no. 4 (Apr., 1941), 24.

38. Littlehales, "Playboys' Rhythm," p. 15.

39. See especially Zolten, "Western Swingtime Music," p. 5. See also Willie Nelson, "A Tribute to Bob Wills," *Country Music,* 2, no. 12 (Aug., 1974), 68–72; Littlehales, "Playboys' Rhythm," p. 15; Hicks, review of Haggard, *Tribute,* p. 60.

40. Smokey Dacus. Also Leon McAuliffe; Al Stricklin; Joe Ferguson; Woodie Wood; Eldon Shamblin.

41. Ray DeGeer; Smokey Dacus.

42. Johnnie Lee Wills; O. W. Mayo.

43. Ray DeGeer.

44. Smokey Dacus.

45. Leon McAuliffe.

46. Ibid.; Smokey Dacus; Al Stricklin.

47. Smokey Dacus.

48. Johnnie Lee Wills; Eldon Shamblin.

49. Johnnie Lee Wills.

50. Smokey Dacus.

11

"The Ballad of 'Seabiscuit' McAuliffe"

Down a long clear stretch of smooth white road,
Rolled a big white bus with its Playboy load,
And the subject that arose as they traveled along,
Was, "Which could run faster, was it Jess or Leon?"

Eleanor Polk, "The Ballad
of 'Seabiscuit' McAuliffe"

The members of the band would not allow any strained relations in their group. If two men had a quarrel, the others either demanded it be resolved in Judge McNally's court or else settled it themselves. If they saw that a man was peeved about something, they roughed him up until he got over it. When Smokey Dacus first came as drummer, something irritated him, so the boys got him down in the floor of the bus, put their feet on him, and rolled him until he got madder. Then they held him and rubbed his head with their knuckles. Smokey was still mad. They did it until he laughed. "They nearly pulled every hair out of my head," he said. As Johnnie Lee noted, "From that time on, he was one of us." It took a more drastic measure to make another new member fit the band. He would not take enough baths to satisfy the other members who rode hundreds of miles a week in his proximity. One winter night as they neared Tulsa and the Arkansas River, someone got the idea of giving him a bath. They stopped at the Arkansas, broke the ice, and threw him, clothes and all, into the river. He got the idea, and another baptism was not necessary. He did not stay in the band very long, but when he left he fit, and he left clean.[1]

In spite of the trauma that accompanied their long bus trips, in spite of their arduous schedule, and in spite of their being together sixteen to eighteen hours a day, the Playboys always managed to have fun with each other. Jesse Ashlock was in the vanguard of any practical joking. He knew how to get the greatest fun out of a man's fears. One night when they were riding toward Tulsa, Bob Wills mentioned that he had always "had a horror of playing before a dance crowd and [his] pants be unzipped."

Ashlock listened with apparent sympathy, said nothing, and waited. A few nights later, Wills was playing his violin before the microphone and two thousand dancers, when Ashlock eased up behind him and whispered in his ear like the serpent, "Bob, your pants are unzipped."[2] Wills, who was playing lead, stopped the music as he almost doubled up trying to cover the unzipped area with his fiddle, hands, arms, knees, legs, and so forth. Two thousand people stopped dancing and looked on in astonishment as Wills examined himself. Pandemonium broke loose on the bandstand as musicians made silly noises and catcalls with their instruments to call even more attention to Wills's embarrassment. Bob Wills waited twenty years to get even; in the early 1950s he pulled the same gag on his singer, Joe Ferguson.[3]

On another occasion, in 1936, Ashlock nearly got himself and the band whipped in Chicago. As he was coming out of Dearborn Station with his little cowboy hat on, a taxi driver called, "Hey, cowboy, where is your hoss?" Ashlock did not like the way he pronounced *hoss.* So he answered, "A jackass will do, come on!" That taxi driver, a few other taxi drivers, and some friends began moving toward Ashlock. But when they saw Herman Arnspiger, Leon McAuliffe, Al Stricklin, and other big fellows, they decided it was better to be called a jackass than to fight.[4]

The Playboys liked to get laughs at the expense of the other members working on the bandstand. This was not something they could do very often; they had to wait between gags so the recipient would forget and again be taken by complete surprise. For weeks they would let Tommy Duncan go to the microphone to sing, for example, and never bother him. Then one night when he least expected it, Jesse or someone would gather up twenty or thirty Coke bottles and form a semicircle with them on the floor just behind Tommy's feet. The slower and more romantic his song, the better. When Tommy turned, after having delivered his romantic ballad and created a low-keyed mood, he kicked bottles all the way across the bandstand and halfway across the dance floor wherever they happened to be playing.[5]

The musicians often kept a cigarette burning, even while they played. At the machine head on the necks of guitars, banjos, violins, and other stringed instruments, there were usually strings that hung a few inches below or stuck above the neck. The boys would bend one of the strings so that they could push it through their cigarette. Then, even while they played, they could turn their instrument toward a fellow musician to allow the lighted end of the cigarette to touch him just enough to make him ruin his chorus or squirm to keep from doing so. Johnnie Lee and others delighted in this kind of horseplay. Al Stricklin was often the brunt of such jokes because he played sitting at the piano. When Wills gave him the

chorus, Al rose a little in alertness, and when he did, under his buttock went a cigarette. As things grew warmer, Al either stood up or was the source of much laughter as his rump and his music both got hot.[6] The boys also liked to annoy him by throwing cigarettes into his piano. One night they did this, and the next morning the piano was discovered blazing, burned beyond repair.[7] Of course, if Bob turned around while this horseplay was going on, every member of the band, regardless of his activities, put on a pious face and appeared to be working hard. Bob knew who was responsible and enjoyed it as much as the boys. In fact, he enjoyed it the more because he knew it was a source of pleasure to them.

The Playboys' audiences entered into the fun and flippancy, both at the dances and, even more, in connection with the noon broadcasts over KVOO. This interaction, of course, was not without commercial value to the Bob Wills organization. The band had played its first dance at Cain's Dancing Academy in Tulsa on New Year's night, 1935,[8] and later that year began playing every Thursday and Saturday night at Cain's. On each of these nights, they broadcast one hour of the dance at midnight. Since the equipment was there already, in late 1935 Wills began broadcasting his noon radio show from Cain's also.[9] Crowds at these broadcasts varied from between two and three hundred to as many as fifteen hundred on special occasions. The radio audience itself was among the largest, if not the largest, in the Southwest. The full spectrum of American society was represented. At a Bob Wills dance, one would see paupers and millionaires, the illiterate and the college educated, prostitutes and preachers, oilfield workers and industrialists. Ages ranged from eight to eighty.[10] It was remarkable that older people in their sixties, seventies, and eighties came not only to the broadcasts, but to the dances as well. A group of older women, some in their seventies and eighties, came regularly to Wills's dances at the Trianon Ballroom in Oklahoma City and other places. Generally, these women either did not dance or were too old to do so. Wills had a special section roped off for them near the bandstand. He often walked over to their table and said, for example, "Aunt Annie, is everything all right? Is anything out of the way? Is anyone bothering you? If I can get you anything, let me know."[11] Wills and his band grew so popular they were often invited to play for state functions, for governors' inaugurals, political rallies, and other special events. Outside of Louis Armstrong and a handful of jazz greats, few bands have played for and been loved by the social, political, and economic extremes—the highs and the lows—as were Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys.[12] Like most popular musicians, however, their greatest appeal was to middle-class America: farmers, ranchers, businessmen, teachers, politicians, blue- and white-collar workers, professional people.[13] Since they had no fan clubs, one cannot give

empirical evidence for this generalization.[14] But the research for this study leaves little doubt about its correctness.

Their audiences, like those of all popular entertainers, included people who listened because it happened to be the only thing entertaining at that time, people who were warm admirers, and fanatics whose admiration turned into a sort of worship. Their radio audience followed very closely the lives and activities of individual members of the band, sending them letters, personal gifts, and food, and remembering them on special occasions. Since Play Boy flour was advertised, the audience sent in favorite recipes.[15] Fans sent pictures of family members and pets and livestock named for the musicians. With the information they gleaned from listening to the radio show, fans made booklets with biographical material on all the Playboys.[16] They bound and decorated these in the form of a scrapbook and sent them to the band.

Naturally, some of the women imagined they were in love with certain band members. This often resulted in no more than friendly letters. However, in Wills's case in particular, it sometimes resulted in outright propositions. Wills's secretary through these years said she often stayed busy answering his "love letters."[17] He was a businessman, and these over-zealous fans were, after all, part of the audience; he had to answer their letters in a way that would turn off their romantic advances and yet keep them in the audience. One letter, from a woman who lived about fifty miles from Tulsa, was an invitation to Wills to meet her near her hometown on a Saturday (while her husband worked) so that they could "get better acquainted." She said she "didn't love her husband" and "he didn't love her." She added that such a rendezvous could be a regular thing and that "her girl friend" was in love with Tommy Duncan. Whether Wills let Duncan decide for himself is not known. In his reply, Bob wrote firmly and diplomatically. Very wisely, he acted naive regarding her sexual advances and told her that she probably really loved her husband and family and that this was the most important thing in life.[18]

Despite the over-zealousness of a few of his patrons, Bob Wills had a very high regard for most of the people who attended his dances. Except for some of the women, he never looked on his fans with contempt; nor did he tolerate any disdain for them by members of his band. His respect was genuine and not merely a show-business facade. If a musician smiled at the dancers during public appearances and revealed his contempt for them on other occasions, Wills quietly removed him from the organization. Such removals were rare, and Wills taught his musicians respect for his people more by example than through fear of losing their jobs. Smokey Dacus said, "Bob's life was wrapped up in the people who were out here. We admired this so much more than we knew because we imitated it . . . and we

became like Bob." Dacus told about an uncle, whom he had never seen before, who attended one of their dances in Holdenville, Oklahoma. The uncle came near the back of the bandstand where Dacus was playing drums and, after introducing himself, said, "These people out there, those damn suckers on that floor think you all are the greatest." Dacus stopped and said, "Uncle Fred, I happen to think a hell of a lot more of them than I do you. When you begin to make sly remarks about them, I don't like it." Dacus said there were some places they had played so many times over a period of several years that they knew 75 percent of the people personally. It was not unusual for them to know families well enough that women would put their babies on the bandstand while they danced: "I've seen eight or ten babies on pallets on the bandstand at one time."[19] Wayne Johnson, who was with several jazz and swing bands before joining Wills in 1939, reflected, "I owe Bob a great debt. He taught me to meet and to like people. Before I went with him I cared nothing about them. His training has helped me to get along in life since I quit playing full time."[20] Woodie Wood, who played clarinet for years with Red Nichols and other jazz bands, remarked, "I never saw the people until I went with Bob. He taught me a lesson for life—to like people."[21] Eldon Shamblin laughed as he told how Bob, as late as 1938, at the close of a dance would stand at the door "like a preacher" and shake hands with the people as they went home.[22]

Respect and admiration breed respect and admiration. The people seemed to sense the feeling that Wills and his band had for them, and they often manifested this more deeply than by loyally attending their public performances. Countless requests came for Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys to play funerals for fans or relatives of fans.[23] Al Stricklin said, "I know it's exaggerated, but it seemed that every time the mortician's phone rang, ours did too." One of the musicians wished they had kept a record of the funerals they helped with. When Betty Stricklin was dating Al, she accompanied the band to so many funerals that she later claimed, "I could have preached a funeral myself." Though the boys found it strange that people would ask dance musicians to play for funerals,[24] it doubtless revealed the people's realization that Wills and his men had much more than a merely economic interest in them. On some occasions, only the "quartet" and Wills helped with the services. At other times Wills took the big bus and the whole band and traveled as far as Fort Smith on Sundays for funerals. Wills, of course, would accept no compensation, regardless of the expense involved in taking twelve to fifteen men several hundred miles. Of these funeral services, Al Stricklin said, "Though I was glad to help the people on those occasions, there was often not a piano, and I couldn't play an organ. Yet Bob insisted I try while he sang 'No Disappointments in Heaven.' They always wanted him to sing that."[25]

Because the Playboys broadcast six days a week, the fans were quite aware of, and shared in, the band members' joys and sorrows, successes and failures. Like most showmen, Wills and his musicians accentuated the positive and played down the more negative aspects of their lives. After all, there was a great economic depression, and people had problems of their own.[26] Bob's idea was to make them happy and add some joy to their lives through the noon broadcast. In the gloomy year of 1938, when twelve million Americans were still unemployed, Wills's first biographer summed up his contribution to his age and perhaps explained a lot of his success in these remarks:

> Bob Wills is not a great man, but he has accomplished a great thing. In a world . . . where empty bellies, twisted minds, oppressed souls, enslaved bodies make the nightmares . . . of wakeful living; where all these things exist, happiness is as elusive as an echo. Those who can make others joyous and carefree for even a little while today are giving as great a service to mankind as the scientists of many professions who fight to rid the world of disease, ignorance, crazy economic structures, and war. Bob Wills brings gaiety and forgetfulness to thousands of men and women with his music.[27]

Ordinarily, when something funny occurred, the Playboys shared it with their radio audience. Such incidents would make an interesting book in themselves; one in particular shows the way audience participation helped make an amusing incident even more so. One night the band had played a dance and was en route back to Tulsa, and for some reason the boys began to talk about footracing. Jesse Ashlock began to boast of his own speed, suggesting implicitly, if not explicitly, that he was the fastest of the Playboys. Resenting Ashlock's boast and wishing to win his money, some of the boys matched Leon McAuliffe against him. As far as size was concerned, the two represented the extremes of the band. Ashlock was about five feet, seven inches in height and weighed little over one hundred pounds. McAuliffe stood well over six feet and weighed at least two hundred pounds. They were a perfect Mutt and Jeff. At an early hour of the morning, the bus came to a stop, and the boys unloaded and made ready for the race. McAuliffe was the favorite, but the odds were good enough that some bet on "Pee Wee." Judge McNally saw to it that there was a judicial start, and they were off and running. McAuliffe took the lead and held it nearly to the finish line, but his legs began to get tangled up, and he fell. Ashlock swept by to win. McAuliffe and his supporters were not satisfied, so they ran it again after about five minutes of heated argument. Again Judge McNally said, "Go!" and they were off and running. It was a replay of the first race, however. McAuliffe held his early lead nearly to the finish line, but his legs got tangled up and he fell. It should be added parenthetically that all witnesses said McAuliffe was completely sober.[28]

This occurred about the time Seabiscuit was outrunning most of the Thoroughbreds of the nation, all except one—War Admiral. Ashlock was too much of a joker to let the incident pass without drawing an analogy between his race with McAuliffe and the two times War Admiral defeated Seabiscuit. On the broadcast the next day Ashlock labeled the famous steel guitar player "Seabiscuit" McAuliffe. Ashlock, Wills, and other Playboys told the whole affair to the hundreds there in person and the thousands listening over the radio. A few days later, a listener entered into the fun by mailing a poem to the band entitled "The Ballad of 'Seabiscuit' McAuliffe." It was read during a broadcast to add to the fun and hilarity. This precious Playboy memento is included here in its entirety, just as it was heard that day in the late 1930s over KVOO:

"The Ballad of 'Seabiscuit' McAuliffe"

Down a long clear stretch of smooth white road,
Rolled a big white bus with its Playboy load,
And the subject that arose as they traveled along,
Was, "Which could run faster, was it Jess or Leon?"

And the boys with one look, at "Seabiscuit's" legs,
Said, "Shucks, that 'horse' has this race in the bag.
"Why, it's only one step Leon has to take,
To cover the land, Jess needs two to make."

And so they decided "Seabiscuit" for me,
But Jesse said, "Heck, I'm lots better than he."
But the fellows said, "No" and their money they placed
On "Seabiscuit's" nose to win in this race.

The bus came to a stop, to settle this guess,
Of, "Which could run faster, Was it Leon or Jesse?"
Two telephone poles was the length of the "track"
The boys had to run there, but they got to walk back.

So the bets were all made, "horses" calmed for the dash,
The starting gun sounded, they were off in a flash!
Down the long clear stretch of smooth white track,
Thundered Seabiscuit and Jesse, they ran neck and neck.

The "grandstand" cheered as they stood on their feet,
Seabiscuit was gaining, Oh! they KNEW he would beat!
First lap nearly passed; Leon in the lead,
"Come on Seabiscuit, Show us some speed!"

But Jesse was gaining, he was pulling up fast,
"Come on Seabiscuit! Don't let him pass!"
And then it all happened, Jesse passed with a bound,
And "Seabiscuit" stumbled and fell to the ground.

The crowd stopped their cheers, they stood there and paled,
Could it be? Was it possible, Seabiscuit had failed?
But, yes, it was true, Jesse crossed the goal clear,
And "Seabiscuit" was left to "bring up the rear."

The heartaches, the headaches, the laments that arose,
As they thought of their money placed on the wrong nose.
Seabiscuit got up and brushed himself off,
And saw at one glance this race he had lost.

Jesse came in a run, and he shouted, "I win!"
Leon said, "It's a foul! Let's run it again."
"Aw! you're all wet!" Jesse said with a howl,
"I ran that race fair, There wasn't no foul!"

"A foul," Leon said, as he rubbed a bruised patch,
"A foul," he insisted, "I tripped on a match!"
Ah! the hopes that that raised, in the hearts of the crowd,
"Run it over again," they shouted out loud.

"Alright," Jesse said, "I'm willing to play,
Come on Seabiscuit, have it your way."
They stood at the "post" they were ready for flight,
Jesse said, "I'll win this, if it takes me all night."

The gun roared! They were off down the track once more,
Leon in the lead as he was once before.
The cheers of the "crowd" roared again and again,
Seabiscuit was running, running to win!

Jesse was gaining, but it wouldn't last,
Seabiscuit was traveling, he couldn't be passed!
But wait! What's that? Soaring round like a plane?
"Ye Gods!!! Leon's feet! He's done it again!

Again Jesse passed, the road was all clear,
Seabiscuit behind, and the finish line near.
"I win! I win!" he shouted once more,
"I win! I win! like I did once before!"

The boys turned around, and went back to the cars,
Seabiscuit the loser, came up counting stars.
Jesse shouted and laughed, and yelled, "Told you so!"
"Come on fellas, pay off, hand me your dough!"

Their hands in their pockets, the boys shook their heads,
One turned 'round to Jesse, and this to him said,
"No, Race is postponed, so we'll keep the 'cup,'
Till Seabiscuit McAuliffe learns how to stand up."[29]

About the time the boys were referring to McAuliffe as Seabiscuit, Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys really did get interested in horses, not racehorses but riding and pleasure horses. This was another source of fun for them and their fans and therefore had commercial value also. Every member of the band bought a horse; some of them, such as Bob and Johnnie Lee Wills and Tommy Duncan, acquired very fine quarter horses.[30] The band joined a roundup club in Tulsa and participated in rodeos and games on Sundays.[31] They could also use these horses at the Bob Wills Stampede, an annual rodeo that Wills and Mayo began in 1939. It was about this time that the band began to dress in cowboy boots and hats and western clothing generally. Dressing like a cowboy was one thing, however; riding like one was another. All the Playboys learned to ride sooner or later, and some of them learned to rope. Bob and Johnnie Lee had grown up in the ranch country of West Texas and knew a good deal about horses and horsemanship.[32] But for the drummer, Smokey Dacus, learning to ride and rope was literally painful, though to fans it was amusing. Eventually Dacus and most of the other musicians became fair riders and ropers.[33] Judge McNally never became a very good rider, and had he ever tried to rope, it would have been necessary to find a new saxophonist and elect a new judge. All their efforts at riding and roping were a source of fun to be shared with their radio audience.[34]

The celebration of birthdays on the Playboy radio shows was always a big event. Judge McNally had a paddle, much like those used for hazing in college fraternities at the time, and he helped each band member celebrate his birthday by whipping him during the noon broadcast. This was a lot of fun for everyone in the audience and in the band except, of course, the celebrant. It appealed to Wills's audience because it gave a family atmosphere to the whole show. Judge McNally would not let any Playboy birthday go by without his added touch. If the birthday fell on Sunday, the celebrant got his on Monday. Judge would waive the paddling rule only if a man would do something very amusing or silly for that day's broadcast. Bob Wills, who was a bit older than most of the other band members, dreaded the paddling more every year.[35] Judge was big and very efficient with the board. One year Bob had the announcer, Everett Stover, announce on March 5, the day before Wills's birthday, that there would be a special guest appearing on the show the next day. Neither Stover nor anyone else knew what was going to happen. The show began at 12:30 P.M. the next day, without Bob Wills. No one suspected anything. Wills had instructed Stover to announce the special guest about 12:40 without fail. Stover did so, and in walked a pretty lady, complete with high heels, curves, and so forth. She came to the bandstand to sing, and the boys recognized "it"—Bob Wills, of course—and for the next twenty minutes the band and, consequently, the audience had a great deal of fun out of

it all. Judge accepted Bob's performance as a legal substitute and revoked the sentence of a whipping.[36]

1. Joe Ferguson; Smokey Dacus; Johnnie Lee Wills; Leon McAuliffe; Al Stricklin.
2. Johnnie Lee Wills; Jesse Ashlock; Joe Ferguson.
3. Joe Ferguson.
4. Jesse Ashlock; Jesse Ashlock (Ken Griffis interview).
5. Sleepy Johnson; Smokey Dacus; Al Stricklin; Jesse Ashlock; Johnnie Lee Wills.
6. Johnnie Lee Wills.
7. Al Stricklin; Smokey Dacus.
8. O. W. Mayo. See also Ruth Sheldon, "Bob Wills, Who Started as Farmer and Barber, Gets 1,000 Fan Letters Weekly for 'Playboys,' " *Tulsa Tribune,* Mar. 7, 1937; Jim Downing, "Wills Brothers Together Again—Bob Back with Heavy Beat," ibid., Jan. 4, 1958; Howard Turner.
9. Bob Wills.
10. Mr. and Mrs. D. T. Hall, for instance, were eighty-one and eighty-five years old respectively when they celebrated their sixty-fourth wedding anniversary. Bob sent them an anniversary cake, which the Halls said could be baked only with Play Boy flour (Halls to Bob Wills, Feb. 26, 1940).
11. My great-aunt, Annie Keck, told me of this incident in Nocona, Texas, before her death about twenty years ago. Also Eldon Shamblin; Smokey Dacus.
12. See Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook; Al Stricklin Scrapbook; Ada Perry Scrapbook; Herman Arnspiger Scrapbook; T.E.Y., "Disc-Delving Highlights & Sidelights—Our Guest Bandleader," *Daily News* (Los Angeles), Dec. 5, 1942; "Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys Celebrating 4 Years of Broadcasting over KVOO," *Tulsa Tribune,* Feb. 6, 1938; Wayne Mason, "Today They Play for Him," *Tulsa Sunday World,* Jan. 18, 1970. Listen especially to Ruth Sheldon Knowles.
13. O. W. Mayo; Ada Perry; Smokey Dacus; Johnnie Lee Wills; Al Stricklin. See especially "Celebrating 4 Years"; Mason, "Today They Play for Him."
14. For a study of Elvis Presley's fans, see Jerry Hopkins, "An 'ELFAN' Is a Friendly Beast," *Popular Music and Society,* 1, no. 1 (Fall, 1971), 6–19. There was a Bob Wills fan club in California called the Antones. It probably had a broad appeal there, but appears never to have gained a national membership. The club did issue a few Bob Wills records. See Foreman Fred to Glenn P. White, Feb. 11, 1951; Antones to White, June 18, 1951. The Antones' announcement of "Bob Wills Old Time Favorites," mailed to White July 11, 1953, included a list of sixteen selections. It is not certain whether these recordings were for public sale or just for club members.
15. Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook; Al Stricklin Scrapbook; Joe Ferguson Scrapbook; Ada Perry Scrapbook.
16. Johnnie Lee Wills Scrapbook. The most valuable of the many booklets and scrapbooks sent by fans were those meticulously prepared by Ruth Thomason of Enid, Oklahoma. She kept a journal of every broadcast, at both noon and midnight, that Wills and his Playboys made during the year. She listed every selection they played, noted who was absent from the broadcast, and wrote down some of what was said as well as when musicians joined or left the band. She included selections on highlights of the year, movies, recordings, photographs, and so on. She typed all of this material, bound it, and presented it to Wills every year at a ceremony in Enid. Unfortunately, only the 1940 edition has survived (hereafter cited as Ruth Thomason, "Journal").
17. Ada Perry; Ada Perry Scrapbook.
18. See this and similar letters in Ada Perry Scrapbook.
19. Smokey Dacus; Bob Wills; James B. Bowman; Ruth Sheldon Knowles.
20. Wayne Johnson; Jamie McIntosh.
21. Woodie Wood.

22. Eldon Shamblin. See also Pete Kendall, "An Old Friend Talks about FW Band Leader Bob Wills," *Fort Worth Press,* Sept. 24, 1972.

23. O. W. Mayo; Ada Perry.

24. Al Stricklin; Betty Stricklin; Eldon Shamblin; Mason, "Today They Play for Him."

25. Al Stricklin; Leon McAuliffe; Betty Wills.

26. Leon McAuliffe.

27. Ruth Sheldon, *Hubbin' It: The Life of Bob Wills* (Tulsa: Privately published, 1938), pp. 5–6. The title of Miss Sheldon's book means "hard times." Her focus is on Wills's struggle to develop his career under adverse economic conditions.

28. Smokey Dacus; Sleepy Johnson; Al Stricklin; Johnnie Lee Wills; Leon McAuliffe; Jesse Ashlock; Herman Arnspiger; Bob Wills.

29. Written by Eleanor Polk of McAlester, Oklahoma.

30. Ferne King, "The Cover Story," *Ranchman,* 5, no. 11 (Mar., 1946), 6. Also Tommy Duncan; Bob Wills; Sleepy Johnson; Johnnie Lee Wills; Smokey Dacus; O. W. Mayo; Herman Arnspiger; Leon McAuliffe; Joe Ferguson; Jesse Ashlock.

31. Bob Wills; Smokey Dacus; Johnnie Lee Wills; Betty Wills; O. W. Mayo; Herman Arnspiger. Wills and the band joined the Tulsa Round-Up Club and the Tulsa Mounted Troop Riders and Ropers Club, and some of them and their wives joined the Tulsa Rangers and Rangerettes. See letters, membership certificates, and other material regarding these organizations in Ada Perry Scrapbook. For an article on Wills's favorite horse, Punkin, see "Dance Band Leader Likes His Horse," *Cogville Valley Sentinel* (Cogville, Oreg.), July 26, 1954. Listen also to the tape of Bob Wills's broadcast from Cain's Academy, 1948.

32. Johnnie Lee Wills. Edna Wills said Bob was an excellent horseman when she met him in 1925.

33. For an amusing discussion of the fun the band members had buying, trading, and riding their horses, listen to Smokey Dacus.

34. The band's use of horses had great commercial value in the age of the "Saturday shoot-'em-up." In many places where they performed, before and after World War II, Wills rode his horse in parades, rodeos, and other public gatherings. See "Bob Wills to Play for Elks Rodeo Dance," *Daily Current-Argus* (Carlsbad, N.M.), May 29, 1949.

35. Johnnie Lee Wills.

36. Bob Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; O. W. Mayo; Al Stricklin; Ada Perry; Joe Ferguson; Mary Lou Cloud.

12

The Glory Years and the Most Versatile Band in America

We're hep. We're the most versatile band in America.
Bob Wills

Wills tried to build a musical organization with a family atmosphere, and it was in this sort of environment that he developed his best Texas Playboy band. In fact, nearly every member of the band who was not married lived either in Bob's home or with his relatives, his mother and father, or aunts and uncles. Leon McAuliffe stayed with both Wills and some of his family the first three years he was in the band. Joe Ferguson and others, often at the same time, lived with Wills and his family.[1] After they married they tried to move within walking distance of Bob's home so they could meet there and leave together in the bus for their engagements. Wives and children went there with their husbands and fathers four days a week to kiss them good-bye and see them off.[2] With their husbands gone nearly every night of the year, the wives lived a lonely life. They generally met at one of their homes every evening to play cards, visit, and exchange advice on rearing children. The person they looked to most for this advice was Bob's mother, "Aunt Emma," as she was known in Tulsa. If their children were feeling poorly, they went to Aunt Emma.[3] She was a wise and gracious woman, and even members of the band, when they needed advice and counseling, would go to talk with her. One of them explained, "She had a philosophy of life that impressed me. I loved to talk to her."[4]

About 1938, Bob Wills bought a place in north Tulsa for his mother and father and their family. The "Big House," as they called it, was surrounded by 265 acres, where Wills could keep several horses. At the Big House the band was like one extended family. There was home cooking and relaxation with Uncle John and Aunt Emma. After dinner, and before the band went to Cain's for a Thursday or Saturday night engagement, they all sometimes danced.[5] This must have reminded the Willses of the country dances they once had at their home down between the rivers in West Texas. The Playboys often rehearsed at the Big House, accompanied

by their wives and girl friends. These rehearsals were always great fun, especially when Uncle John joined in the jam session with his frontier fiddle and frontier yells. Because the men lived in this atmosphere and played together for so long, there was a closeness and a spirit in the band of the Tulsa years that no other Wills band ever had.[6]

Wills's paternalistic attitude toward his Tulsa band reflected his sense of responsibility toward his own relatives; though he did not help his band in quite the same manner, his attitudes and actions went beyond a mere business relationship. Bob Wills supported not only his own family, but also his father and mother, some of his brothers and sisters, plus nieces and nephews and aunts and uncles and other needy relatives.[7] Most of his life he had to provide for many people. Interviews with members of the Wills family reveal a closeness and love that is both rare and admirable. The devotion and appreciation expressed by Bob's sisters, brothers, and other relatives is even more extraordinary. Perhaps this is due in part to his kindness in providing for them over the years, especially during the worst of the Depression.[8]

Because his father had always wanted a farm in West Texas, Bob bought him one near Muleshoe in 1936. In reality, he bought another man's equity and paid for the property during the next few years on a yearly installment basis.[9] But John Wills irresponsibly ran up debts he could not possibly pay[10] and even mortgaged the tractor and other equipment needed to operate the farm.[11] West Texas banks, as well as other businesses, wrote to Bob in Tulsa, as if the debts of the elder Wills and his family were Bob's responsibility.[12] Moreover, John Wills decided to start his own band and bought radio time on station KICA in Clovis, New Mexico. This venture cost Bob nearly a thousand dollars, and the station later billed him for $247 more.[13] John Wills's life as a farmer was proving too expensive for his son. Bob also thought the life was too hard on his mother, and by early 1938 he had moved John Wills and his family to the home he had bought in north Tulsa. In the meantime, one of Bob's uncles had tried cotton farming in West Texas, went broke, and wrote him for money. Wills sent him five hundred dollars and eventually moved him to his father's farm at Muleshoe.[14] Actually, Bob Wills was not financially able to do all this at the time, and he could not aid all the relatives who asked for help. In 1936 he was buying a sewing machine by ten-dollar monthly payments.[15] His letters in early 1937 indicate he was barely making enough money to meet his own obligations.[16] Nevertheless, he continued to help any relatives who needed it, and some who did not.

Two of Bob's nieces, one of them orphaned at the age of three, the other the daughter of his crippled sister, both told how, when they and their mothers lived in the Big House with the John Wills family, "Uncle Bob" provided for them in every way until they married and had their own

families. Whenever Bob bought clothing for one of his sisters, he always bought the same for them.[17] When one of the nieces started high school, Wills rented her and her mother an apartment so they could have their own home. He opened an account at a nearby grocery store for them and settled the account monthly. "When I needed shoes or a dress or anything else, Mama would call Uncle Bob at Cain's. Uncle Bob would be there for the noon broadcast and would say, 'You send her down to Cain's, honey.' " "Uncle Bob" not only paid the rent and provided utilities, food, and clothing, he also paid "all the extra expenses" that came in her high school years. Wills never complained and always gave cheerfully. On special occasions he would tell her, "Honey, here is an extra five or ten dollars. Get your mother something for Mother's Day," Christmas, or whatever the event was.[18] Wills supported his many relatives with this same kindness, though it must have been a heavy burden, for he had his own immediate family to provide for at the same time.[19]

Wills also helped many people to whom he was no relation.[20] Smokey Dacus said, "He was the most totally unselfish human I've ever known. He gave away more fortunes than others have made. A guy would come up to Bob in a pair of overalls and ask him for five or ten dollars, and Bob would loan it and never ask his name." Wills was especially generous when a fellow asked him for money to go see his mother. "Bob would ask him, 'How much is the fare? How many days are you going to be there?' Then Bob would figure his meals and a round-trip ticket and give him the money. Occasionally some guy took advantage of his kindness, and we would see the guy at a dance a few days later. But Bob would never say a word about the money. His conscience told him he had done the right thing if the man *had* been honest." Ada Perry, Wills's secretary from 1936 to 1942, said that people "just came to Cain's" and asked Wills for money. "I remember lots of people coming there to Bob's office. I've written a lot of checks for Bob to give to people. He was very generous." Bob's sister Ruby recalled the lean years of the Great Depression, in the mid- and late 1930s: "He used to give people money years ago. People would come up to Cain's, little kids with few clothes on or half-dressed and dirty. Bob would give them money and say, 'Go buy them kids some clothes.' And if it was wintertime, he would say, 'Get 'em some coats. They're cold.' "[21]

Edna Wills said Bob was always helping people he did not even know. "It wasn't unusual for him to hear about somebody needing something, and he'd help by sending money to them." A few years after Bob and Edna were divorced, a woman whose car had stalled in the street near Edna's home asked to use her telephone. Seeing a photograph of Bob on the telephone stand, the woman asked if Edna knew Wills. Edna told her she did and that she and Bob had been married for several years but were divorced in 1935. The stranger told how, though she never knew Bob

Wills, he had once helped her when she desperately needed it. Her husband deserted her, and she had to provide for several children. This was during the Great Depression, and when the woman got behind on all her bills, her landlord told her she must move; all her utilities were cut off, and her furniture was repossessed. Somehow, the story of her misfortune got into the newspaper. Someone paid her back rent; her utilities were turned on again; her furniture was returned to her home; and a grocery store provided a big supply of food. When she asked the landlord, the utility companies, the furniture store, and the grocery who had done all this, each named Bob Wills. Edna remembered the newspaper story, but she never knew until that day that it was Bob who had helped the woman and her children. "Bob never knew her," Edna said, "but this was the kind of person he was."[22]

Bob's humanitarianism was more widely known than perhaps even Edna realized. One fan, for example, in the 1930s or early forties, composed the following tribute (reproduced here just as he wrote it):

> Our Friend Bob Wills
> he is slow in choosing a
> Friend, and slower to
> change him; he is courteous
> to all, intimate with few
> and slights no man for
> his poverty nor esteems
> no man for his wealth.
> he smiles, always smiles;
> yet he has the saddest
> face I ever saw, he
> always helps you while
> you are here on earth,
> he don't wait until you
> are gone
>
> Sincerely
> Uncle Mc[23]

In the scant Wills correspondence that has survived, there are letters thanking him for "loans" for hospital bills and various other purposes.[24] Ada Perry attributed Wills's generosity to "the Christian concept of giving. He was religious, and he practiced a lot of religion." Eldon Shamblin, who observed him for more than twenty years, agreed: "He was a humanitarian and would help anybody that needed help." O. W. Mayo credited Wills's generosity to the fact that Bob "came up the hard way" and therefore knew what it was to be in need.[25]

Similarly, knowing how difficult the road had been for himself, Wills tried to make it easier for other bands and musicians. Art Davis, for instance, who between 1938 and 1949 led a band in Tulsa called the

Rhythm Riders, told how Wills befriended them. "When I first came to Tulsa in 1938, it was hard getting established as Bob Wills was King in Tulsa, music wise. Well, Bob knew me and always tried to help everybody. So one day he told me, 'Art, we get a lot of calls from smaller towns that want us, but they are just too small to handle, so how about you and your group handling them?' " Davis said they "benefited from everything Bob Wills continued to turn down and of course Bob's office phone rang off the wall."[26] Davis's statement reveals not only Wills's popularity in Tulsa, but also two clues to this popularity, his character and his personality.

Bob once befriended a musician in the state penitentiary at McAlester, Oklahoma. At various times, when he and the band played concerts for the prisoners, Bob often allowed inmate musicians to play with the band. A young trombonist from the prison jazz band impressed Bob both as a musician and as a person. Since Wills needed a trombone player, he met with the warden, then the governor, and finally persuaded them to parole the man in his custody. For several weeks the young fellow played the radio shows and dances, but some fans kept writing letters to Bob and KVOO officials complaining about the presence of an ex-convict in Wills's organization. The press and radio also made a great to-do about the trombonist, and the crowds fell off in some places. Bob was eventually convinced it was best, if only for the man, to remove him from the band. This was one of the few times in his life Wills was angry enough with his fans to let them know about it. He announced on his noon radio show that he had taken the former prisoner out of the band and that he hoped the people who had complained were satisfied. "I wanted to help a young man who never really had a chance," he told them. "I wanted to give him something to live for." He lectured those who had objected, called them heartless and inhumane, and even announced he was ashamed to have them referred to as his fans. He gave the boy $200, "to help you out," as he told him, "until you get another job."[27]

While Wills was always concerned about the welfare of the members of his own band, he felt especially paternalistic toward his Tulsa musicians, who were with him so many years. First of all, he paid them more than union scale. Some of the men started in 1934 and 1935 at a salary of thirty dollars a week, which was above scale. Leon McAuliffe said, "You didn't have to ask for a raise with Bob. He gave it to you." Smokey Dacus joined Wills in 1935 at four times the salary he was making playing with an orchestra in a Tulsa hotel. "Wills never paid me what he was supposed to. When he told me he would pay me fifty-five dollars a week, he paid me from sixty-five to eighty dollars a week. He raised me to sixty-five dollars a week and paid me from seventy-five to ninety dollars a week. Four weeks later he raised me to ninety dollars a week and paid me over one hundred dollars a week. In fact," Dacus continued, "I've been paid ninety dollars in one night. The first dance we played in the old Coliseum in Tulsa was a big

deal. We played to five thousand people. Bob paid me ninety dollars for the one night. He paid the others accordingly."[28] These were good salaries for the 1930s, especially if one considers they were charging only forty cents per person for the dances at Cain's and seventy-five cents on the road. O. W. Mayo summed it up: "Bob paid about all the business would stand."[29] Wills did pay good salaries, but the claims of some fans, journalists, and disc jockeys that the members of Wills's band were the highest-paid musicians in America are based on nothing but hearsay and are ridiculous. Other musicians were being paid several times as much in the thirties and early forties.

Actually, Wills was concerned with much more than seeing that his musicians received good salaries. "If any of the boys in the band happened to get in trouble," Eldon Shamblin said, "Bob was always right there."[30] The most revealing example of this involved the death of the wife of his piano player, Al Stricklin. A cancer developed on the calf of her leg and had spread throughout her body before the doctors discovered it. She died at the age of twenty-five, when their daughter was only three years old. During her prolonged illness, Stricklin had not only medical expenses, but the additional expense of hiring a woman to care for their daughter. "I had saved some money, but it was all gone when she died," Stricklin said. "I went into the office and told Bob I had to have five hundred dollars to bury my wife." Bob told Mayo to write him a check. Stricklin went to Texas for the funeral and was gone about two weeks. In the meantime Bob told the boys not to refer to Al's wife's death: "This boy will do better if you don't mention it at all." In about three months, Stricklin went into the office at Cain's and told Mayo he would like to begin paying ten dollars a week on the loan. Mayo told him he "should see Bob about it." In a few days Stricklin asked Wills if he could ride with him in his car rather than in the bus. Stricklin said he would never forget it. As they rode along, he said, "Bob, I believe I'm beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel, and I would like to start paying you back. I believe I can pay you ten dollars a week, anyway.... I figured, and it wouldn't take but a year." Bob said, "What are you talking about, kid?" Stricklin answered, "The money I borrowed from you, damn it. I got it, you know, when my wife passed away." Wills retorted, "I didn't loan you any money. Can't a guy give his friends something?" Stricklin said he just "sat there and bawled and cried." When he related this incident, nearly thirty-five years after it happened, he had to brush the tears from his eyes and clear a choked throat before he could finish the story. "Gosh, that guy—you can't imagine, you just can't imagine how that guy can get hold of you."[31]

Bob Wills never mentioned these good deeds or allowed them to be publicized in any way, either at the time or later. As a showman, he knew the value of publicity; but he never allowed his humanitarianism to be

dragged down to a commercial level. Stricklin, for example, told this story of Bob's generosity during one of the very first interviews for this study, and not a single Playboy subsequently interviewed knew of this incident. Moreover, when the musicians collectively helped someone, they never allowed it to be commercialized. One document, labeled only "An Agreement," reveals this: "As Members of the Organization of Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys, I do hereby agree to donate and give freely, a small part of my weekly salary, for a good and worthy cause, which has been explained to us, and do promise not to mention said donation to anyone outside of the organization—Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys." Fourteen Texas Playboys signed this agreement.

These incidents reflect the relationship that existed between Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys during the Tulsa years. And they had a great deal in common beyond their musical interests. All of them loved horses and livestock. Wills used this fact to commercial advantage, but that did not make their cowboy image any less real.[32] In late 1939 or early 1940, Wills called the band in at Cain's and said, "We're going to have to quit someday. We are not always going to ride the crest." Then he told them he wanted to buy a big ranch in New Mexico and divide it up among the band members. After they retired they would live close enough to each other to get together every few nights for a jam session. Every band member by then could handle horses and livestock well enough that with experience they could have managed a rancher's life. Except one—Judge McNally.[33] Wills planned to build Judge a store in the center of the ranches, where he could still "judge" and sell them their supplies. It sounded romantic, but according to Dacus, Wills fully intended to do it. "If any man broke the pattern," Dacus said, "it would have spoiled the whole thing. It was determining the pattern of life for all of us. And he gave it up on that account. It was a good thought, and it tells you how we felt about each other."[34]

This atmosphere of happiness and fulfillment during those Tulsa years came through to the public and contributed to the Playboys' popularity. Their records outsold all others on the Vocalion label in 1936 and continued to be among the best sellers on Vocalion and later on Okeh and Columbia through the remaining thirties and the forties. In the Vocalion catalog titled *Latest Hits, Hottest Bands, Listing All Vocalion Popular Records Released up to September 20, 1939,* Wills had more releases than any of the other 195 artists, except one group: the Hoosier Hot Shots had eighty-eight releases, while Wills had seventy-seven.[35] In 1941, *Metronome* reported that Wills's band was "the best-selling Columbia record band at the moment. . . ."[36] Arthur Satherley of Columbia Records estimated that Bob Wills's records were played on three hundred thousand jukeboxes and were heard by millions in every section of the United States each day. Some of them were played from ten to twenty or even more times a day, because

the restaurants, taverns, and other places where the jukeboxes were located had a continuous turnover of clientele.[37]

The band was doing as well at its dances as it was on records, averaging from one thousand to fifteen hundred people at dances on the road and from seven to eight hundred on Thursday night and twelve to fifteen hundred on Saturday night at Cain's.[38] As early as 1937, the Playboys began to break attendance records, then continued to break their own records right up to World War II. For example, Phil Harris played a popular dance auditorium in Amarillo in 1937 and broke the attendance record by drawing seventeen hundred dancers. Rarely would a manager be foolish enough to book *anyone* behind Phil Harris. However, perhaps through an error or a mix-up in dates, Bob Wills and the Playboys were booked for the same auditorium the next night. They played to twenty-four hundred people.[39]

By the late thirties, Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys had become the most popular dance band in the Southwest. It was not unusual for people of all ages to drive from one to two hundred miles, and often even farther, to a Bob Wills dance. His was the band most people in a five-state area wanted for dances, shows, fairs, rodeos, and even special political affairs. In 1939, Wills and his Texas Playboys were selected as the official orchestra for the inaugural ball of Governor Leon C. Phillips of Oklahoma.[40] They were again honored by being selected to perform when seven governors and the mayor of Tulsa were "the distinguished speakers on the program" for a benefit in Tulsa. The demand for their services was about as great in Oklahoma City as it was in Tulsa.[41]

As early as 1936, the newspapers in both cities began to refer to the group as Oklahoma's "nationally famous orchestra."[42] This propaganda was more prophetic of what the band would become three or four years later than it was a fact in 1936. It was not until after 1938 that Wills really began to develop a musical organization that compared favorably with the big swing bands that were popularly called "orchestras" in the 1930s. By that time Wills had begun to surround himself with musicians who, by the standards of popular artists, would be considered first-rate.[43] Because he was making a good deal of money at dances and through record sales, and because he was more concerned with good music than he was with making money, Wills could and did hire the quality musicians he had always admired and hoped to employ.[44] And many of the better musicians were available; times were so hard during those Depression years that the Works Progress Administration began its Federal Music Project in 1935 to give employment to musicians.[45] Because of the economic conditions of that decade, Wills could move toward the band "he built for himself."[46]

To Wills the standard of excellence for dance orchestras was set by swing bandleaders such as Tommy Dorsey, Count Basie, Bob Crosby, and

Everett Stover, announcer and trumpet player for Bob Wills from 1934 until 1940. *(Courtesy Edna Wills)*

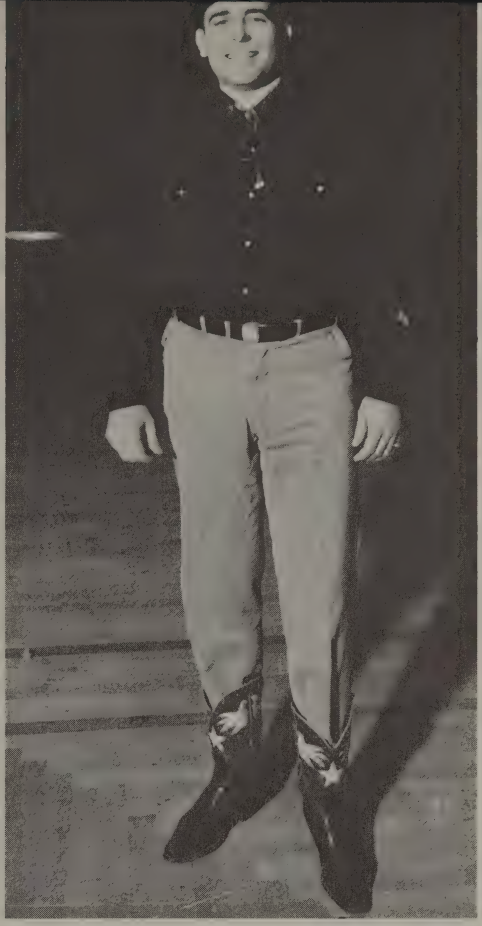
Bob Wills and Arthur E. Satherley in the mid-1930s. *(Courtesy Edna Wills)*

O. W. Mayo, business manager of the Wills organization from 1933 until 1943, in his office at Cain's Dancing Academy. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys at an early-morning rehearsal, about 1937. *Left to right:* Everett Stover (trumpet), Zeb McNally (saxophone), Leon McAuliffe, Alan Franklin (announcer), Tiny Mott (saxophone), Herman Arnspiger, Al Stricklin, Joe Ferguson, Bob Wills (fiddle), Smokey Dacus, Tommy Duncan, Son Lansford (bass), Sleepy Johnson (tenor banjo). *(Courtesy Al Stricklin)*

Bill Mooney's "4th Annual Cartoon of Bob Wills' Play-Boys," 1938. *(Courtesy Ada Perry)*

Some Texas Playboys with Ruth Thomason, who kept a diary of Playboy radio broadcasts in the early 1940s. *(Courtesy Rosetta Wills Arnett)*



Bob Wills at Cain's Dancing Academy in Tulsa, 1940. *(Courtesy Johnnie Lee Wills)*

Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys with Gene Autry in Texarkana, 1939 or 1940. *Left to right:* Leon McAuliffe (steel guitar), Everett Stover (trumpet), Charles Laughton (trumpet), Joe Ferguson, Zeb McNally (saxophone), Jesse Ashlock (fiddle), Bob Wills (fiddle), Gene Autry, Sleepy Johnson, Tommy Duncan, Eldon Shamblin (guitar), O. W. Mayo, Al Stricklin (piano). *(Courtesy Al Stricklin)*

Official Program

TULSA'S ANNUAL CHAMPIONSHIP

RODEO

SPONSORED BY

BOB WILLS

AND HIS

TEXAS PLAYBOYS

OFFICIALS

ARENA DIRECTOR
FLOYD GALE
Morris, Okla.

BUSINESS MANAGER
O. W. MAYO
Tulsa, Okla.

ARENA SECRETARY
FRED ALVORD
Alvord, Texas

ANNOUNCER
JOHN JORDAN
Fort Worth, Texas

JUDGES

HARRY KNIGHT
Florence, Arizona

HERB MEYERS
Okmulgee, Okla.

TIMERS

SKIP GOODSON
Broken Arrow, Okla.

HERSCHELL ROSS
Holbert, Okla.

PICK-UP MEN

DICK TRUITT
Stonewall, Okla.

BOB CROSBY
Roswell, New Mexico

NEVER TWICE ALIKE

A page from the program for the first annual Bob Wills Stampede, 1939. *(Courtesy Herman Arnspiger)*

Grand entry or rodeo parade at the Bob Wills Tulsa Stampede Rodeo, 1939. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys with their horses, 1940. *Left to right:* Bob Wills, Smokey Dacus, Eldon Shamblin, Tiny Mott, Johnnie Lee Wills, Zeb McNally, Herman Arnspiger, Joe Ferguson, Everett Stover, Son Lansford, Leon McAuliffe, Jesse Ashlock, Al Stricklin, Tubby Lewis, Tommy Duncan, O. W. Mayo. *(Photo by Miller Photo; courtesy Al Stricklin)*

The Bob Wills brass or trumpet section, 1940. *Left to right:* Bob Wills, Jamie McIntosh, Tubby Lewis, Everett Stover. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys, 1940, the "San Antonio Rose" band. *Left to right:* Herman Arnspiger, Leon McAuliffe (steel guitar), Zeb McNally (saxophone), Everett Stover (trumpet), Joe Ferguson (saxophone), Tubby Lewis (trumpet), Tiny Mott (saxophone), Bob Wills (fiddle), Smokey Dacus (drums), Jesse Ashlock (fiddle), Son Lansford (bass), Johnnie Lee Wills (tenor banjo), Tommy Duncan (vocals) Al Stricklin (piano), Eldon Shamblin (guitar), O. W. Mayo. *(Photo by Miller Photo; courtesy Al Stricklin)*

Glenn Miller.[47] By 1940 Wills had added enough horns to play the style of music their bands played; yet he kept his stringed instruments and used them as he always had. By 1939 he found that, after he started building his horn band, he had an excess of musicians who played stringed instruments. Also, his younger brother Luther J. wanted to be a musician, and Son Lansford had returned to the band. Rather than leave some of his musicians and relatives without jobs, he started a new band and put his brother Johnnie Lee in charge. "In late 1939 or early '40, I believe it was 1940," Johnnie Lee said, "Bob was increasing his outfits. Mostly horns and brass he added and didn't need a banjo player. So I . . . formed Johnnie Lee Wills and his Boys which I eventually increased to thirteen or fourteen men."[48] Bob also helped his father start a band called Uncle John and his Young Five. Bob could use these units to place men who did not fit in his big band, and on other occasions he used them, especially Johnnie Lee Wills's group, to recruit good musicians for his own band.

Even after starting these other groups Wills had, as Ray DeGeer pointed out, "two bands in one. He had a string band and a horn band."[49] Actually, he had two "front lines," to use musicians' jargon. In most cases he still used fiddles or violins for lead instruments. But in Tulsa he added enough brass and reeds that he could use horns for the lead also. He had done this to some extent by 1935 and 1936, when Everett Stover (trumpet), Zeb McNally (saxophone and clarinet), and Ray DeGeer or Tiny Mott (saxophone) formed the front line in the horn band. Then, however, he played a purer dixieland style and used more primitive jazz or race music. By 1940 he had five saxophones, two clarinets, and two trumpets, more horns than all the instruments combined in the band he brought to Tulsa in 1934. There were other differences. Though Wills always liked hot music, these saxophones had cooled his music somewhat by late 1939 and early 1940. The kind of music he was playing by then perhaps cooled it even more. He was using more swing or pop music, closer to what the big swing bands were playing, and less of the hot, jazzy, race music. The jazz was still there in Wills's swing, but it was more sophisticated, more inhibited than what he recorded between 1935 and 1938. By 1941, Wills had one man in his organization, Granville King, whose principal task was to write arrangements.[50] Most of the music the horn musicians played was ensemble work with written arrangements.[51]

According to both Wills and his musicians, the band in the late thirties and early forties was the best Wills ever had. This band—actually, two bands in one—gave Wills such breadth of repertory that it is doubtful any other orchestra in American musical history ever approached it. The band was reputed to have had a repertory of thirty-six hundred selections by 1938.[52] This may account, at least in part, for Wills's appeal to people of all ages and stations of life. A sampling of the titles Bob Wills and his Texas

Playboys recorded between 1935 and the early 1950s reveals their incredible variety: blues selections, "St. Louis Blues," "Empty Bed Blues," "Down Hearted Blues"; fiddle tunes, "Beaumont Rag," "Done and Gone," "Prosperity Special"; New Orleans jazz, "Wang Wang Blues," "Back Home Again in Indiana," "Darktown Strutters' Ball"; cowboy classics, "Take Me Back to My Boots and Saddle," "Cool Water," "Little Joe the Wrangler," "Wagon Wheels"; Spanish music, "La Golondrina," "Medley of Spanish Waltzes"; Hawaiian music, "Hawaiian War Chant," "'Neath Hawaiian Palms," "Aloha"; South American and Spanish novelties, "La Cucaracha," "El Rancho Grande"; American favorites, "Sweet Georgia Brown," "Margie," "Up a Lazy River,"; country classics, "You Are My Sunshine," "No Letter Today"; Jimmie Rodgers compositions, "Never No More Blues," "I'm in the Jailhouse Now"; guitar music, "Steel Guitar Rag," "Twin Guitar Special"; jazz band favorites, "I Ain't Got Nobody," "I'm a Ding Dong Daddy," "Jelly Roll Blues"; Wills's own compositions, "San Antonio Rose," "Spanish Two Step," "Maiden's Prayer"; pop music, "Sentimental Journey," "Five Minutes More," "For Sentimental Reasons"; big swing-band selections, "In the Mood," "Woodchopper's Ball," "On the Alamo"; boogie-woogie, "Bottle Baby Boogie," "Ida Red Likes the Boogie"; folk dance music, "Bob Wills Schottische," "Bob Wills Square Dance No. 1"; rock-and-roll, "So Let's Rock," "Rock around the Clock"; Wayne King's "Waltz You Saved for Me"; Ira and George Gershwin's "Oh, Lady Be Good"; Irving Berlin's "Alexander's Ragtime Band" and "White Christmas"; Hoagy Carmichael's "Star Dust" and "Ole Buttermilk Sky"; Franz Liszt's "Liebestraum"; Gioacchino Antonio Rossini's "William Tell Overture."[53] This list, based as it is primarily on records, by no means adequately demonstrates the band's breadth; unfortunately, not enough tapes of their dances from this period exist to allow a really representative sampling.[54] Nevertheless, it shows that there was more to the advertisement of Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys as "America's most versatile dance band" than mere Music Corporation of America propaganda.[55] Wills took pride in the versatility of his music. "We're hep. We're the most versatile band in America," he once boasted. "Sure we give 'em western music like 'Mama Don't Allow No Lowdown Fiddlin' around Here,' and 'Little Liza Jane,' but we give 'em rhumbas, too. And when there are jitterbugs in the joint we get 'em so happy they can't stay on the floor. We lay it on like they want it."[56]

1. Leon McAuliffe; Joe Ferguson; Son Lansford; Bob Wills; Edna Wills; Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House; Mary Lou Cloud; Johnnie Lee Wills; Al Stricklin; Edna Wills Scrapbook.

2. Sleepy Johnson; Wayne Johnson; Edna Wills; Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House; Johnnie Lee Wills; Luke Wills.

3. Sleepy Johnson; Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House; Al Stricklin; Edna Wills; Robbie Wills Calhoun; Edna Wills Scrapbook; Robbie Wills Calhoun Scrapbook.

4. Ray DeGeer. Also Laverne Simmons Barnhill; Mrs. F. O. Ham; Ruth House.

5. O. W. Mayo; Johnnie Lee Wills; Mary Helen Brown; Leon McAuliffe; Ray DeGeer; Wayne Johnson; Danny Alguire; Son Lansford; Al Stricklin; Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House; Bob Wills.

6. Bob Wills; Betty Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; Luke Wills; Billy Jack Wills; Al Stricklin; Smokey Dacus; Eldon Shamblin.

7. Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House; Lorene Wills Burton; Joe Burton; Johnnie Lee Wills; Bobby Taylor; Lerlene Stout; Son Lansford. All of the band members and members of the Wills family mentioned this aspect of Bob's life. See also Bob Wills to J. T. (John) Wills, Oct. 14, 1937; Ada Perry Scrapbook; Edna Wills; Edna Wills Scrapbook.

8. Bobby Taylor; Lerlene Stout; Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House; Lorene Burton; Edna Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; Son Lansford; Al Stricklin; Sleepy Johnson; Herman Arnspiger; Luke Wills; O. W. Mayo; Ada Perry Scrapbook.

9. In a letter dated December 29, 1936, Wills wrote his father that he owed a balance of $7,900 on the farm. The payment due on the farm on December 15, 1937, was $580.54 plus $417.99 interest on the note (F. E. Miller, E. W. Miller Real Estate, to Bob Wills, Dec. 15, 1937). By the late thirties Bob was doing well enough to make larger payments, and the property was completely paid for when he went into the army in 1942. Listen to O. W. Mayo; Bob Wills; Betty Wills.

10. See Foxworth-Galbraith Lumber Co., Sudan, Tex., to Bob Wills, Dec. 31, 1936; Bob Wills to Foxworth-Galbraith Lumber Co., Jan. 5, 1937, Feb. 1, 1938, Apr. 13, 1939; Bob Wills to Gulf Oil Corp., Muleshoe, Tex., June 30, 1937; W. W. Carpenter to Bob Wills, Jan. 24, 1938.

11. Bob Wills to J. T. (John) Wills, July 7, 1937.

12. Merrill S. Bernard Law Offices to Bob Wills, Dec. 17, 1936. Though Bernard recognized that the debts of Bob's relatives were not Bob's, he nevertheless asked his help in collecting them. See Bernard to Wills, Dec. 18, 1936.

13. Charles C. Alsup, KICA, to Bob Wills, Feb. 23, 1938; Wills to Alsup, Mar. 1, 1938.

14. Bob Wills to G. P. Lansford, Jan. 26, 1937. See also documents relative to Lansford's years on the farm in Ada Perry Scrapbook. Wills wrote his father on January 26, 1937, that he "had taxes and expenses that we had never thought of and never dreamed about and it has caused me to have to borrow around the neighborhood of $2,000."

15. See installment loan receipt of payment from Singer Sewing Machine Co., June 12, 1937, in Ada Perry Scrapbook.

16. E.g., Bob Wills to A. G. Foley, Nov. 8, 1937. See also Bob's letters to Son Lansford, Dec. 9, 1936, and to Mrs. J. C. Kuykendall (an aunt), May 25, 1939.

17. Bobby Taylor; Lerlene Stout; Lorene Wills Burton; Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House; Robbie Wills Calhoun; Edna Wills; Mary Lou Cloud.

18. Lerlene Stout. Also Edna Wills House.

19. Bobby Taylor; Lerlene Stout; Lorene Wills Burton. Listen especially to Robbie Wills Calhoun; Edna Wills.

20. Ada Perry; Eldon Shamblin; Edna Wills; Betty Wills; O. W. Mayo; Smokey Dacus; Al Stricklin; Rochelle Befort, "Bob Wills Revisited: 'Daddy of Western Swing,' " *Tulsa Tribune,* Mar. 31, 1971.

21. Smokey Dacus; Ada Perry. Also Eldon Shamblin; Leon McAuliffe; Sleepy Johnson; Herman Arnspiger; Al Stricklin; Edna Wills; Ruby Wills Sullivan; O. W. Mayo; Woodie Wood; Wayne Johnson; Betty Wills; Ruth Sheldon Knowles.

22. Edna Wills.

23. Bob was evidently very proud of this tribute. The original is prominently placed inside the front cover of the first volume of the Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook.

24. E.g., Francis Strickler to Bob Wills, Dec. 7, 1942; Bonnie Strickler to Bob Wills, Dec. 8, 1942. Also Smokey Dacus; Al Stricklin; Leon McAuliffe; Eldon Shamblin; Wayne Mason, "Today They Play for Him," *Tulsa Sunday World,* Jan. 18, 1970; Edna Wills; Robbie Wills Calhoun; Joe Holley.

25. Ada Perry; Eldon Shamblin; O. W. Mayo.

26. Glenn P. White, "Popular Western Swing Band: Dave Edwards and His Alabama Boys," *Record Research,* No. 99 (July, 1969), p. 8. Also Clyde McDonald, field notes. McDonald, who played with Billy's Melody Five in Wichita Falls in the 1940s, said Wills would play "battle dances" with that group and give them half the money, just to help them out. It was Wills's fame that drew the crowds, but he nevertheless gave them half the gate. When their bus broke down after one of those affairs in Tulsa, Wills lent them his nearly new bus to go back to Wichita Falls and would not take anything for the loan.

27. Al Stricklin; Bob Wills; Leon McAuliffe; Johnnie Lee Wills; Betty Wills; Smokey Dacus.

28. Smokey Dacus; Leon McAuliffe; Ray DeGeer; Al Stricklin; Edna Wills; Edna Wills, "What I Know"; O. W. Mayo; Bob Wills.

29. O. W. Mayo; Edna Wills.

30. Mason, "Today They Play for Him"; Eldon Shamblin; Ruby Shamblin.

31. Al Stricklin. Also Edna Wills; Eldon Shamblin; Smokey Dacus; O. W. Mayo; Wayne Johnson; Woodie Wood; Son Lansford.

32. Ferne King, "The Cover Story," *Ranchman,* 5, no. 11 (Mar., 1946), 6; Edna Wills.

33. Johnnie Lee Wills.

34. Smokey Dacus; Ruth Sheldon, *Hubbin' It: The Life of Bob Wills* (Tulsa: Privately published, 1938), pp. 142–143. See especially "Homecoming: Reflections on Bob Wills, 1915–1973," my brochure notes to *For the Last Time,* United Artists UA-LA216-J2.

35. Vocalion artists included Louis Armstrong, Gene Autry, Mildred Bailey, Count Basie, Cab Calloway, Jan Garber, Johnny Hodges, Dick Jurgens, Sammy Kaye, the Light Crust Doughboys, Jimmie Lunceford, Ginny Simms, and Lawrence Welk.

36. "Okies Reverse Order of Steinbeck's Tale," *Metronome,* 57, no. 4 (Apr., 1941), 24. In 1941, Wills had two of Okeh's "best sellers," according to "Review Okeh Country Dance, Folk Song and Race (Blues) Records, June 1941," an Okeh special catalog. The two records included "Take Me Back to Tulsa," "New Worried Mind," "New San Antonio Rose," and "Bob Wills Special."

37. Arthur E. Satherley to me, Feb. 4, 1973.

38. O. W. Mayo. See also Ada Perry Scrapbook.

39. Smokey Dacus; Leon McAuliffe; Joe Ferguson; Al Stricklin; Wayne Johnson; Ray DeGeer; Danny Alguire; Neil Duer.

40. Herman Arnspiger Scrapbook; O. W. Mayo; Jamie McIntosh; Mrs. Jamie McIntosh; Al Stricklin; Leon McAuliffe; Son Lansford; Eldon Shamblin; Betty Wills; Bob Wills; Dot Townsend.

41. Eldon Shamblin, field notes. A news bulletin published in Tulsa for the employees of the Public Service Company reported that the musical entertainment for their annual "get-together . . . by-the-way was none other than Bob Wills and his Texas Play-Boys"; see "Bob Wills Plays at Peoples Ice Jubilee," *Public Service News,* 9, no. 3 (Mar., 1938), 2. See also the letter from M. C. Harrison, Director of Education, Public Service Co. of Oklahoma, to Bob Wills, Mar. 2, 1938.

42. Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook; Joe Ferguson Scrapbook; Ada Perry Scrapbook; Al Stricklin Scrapbook; Glenn P. White Scrapbook; Al Stricklin; Bob Wills; O. W. Mayo; Edna Wills; Edna Wills Scrapbook.

43. Even Columbia began to acknowledge this. They labeled "New San Antonio Rose," Okeh 05694 (1940), as "vocal by Tommy Duncan with orchestral acc."

44. Musicians who played with Ben Pollack, Charlie Barnet, Gene Krupa, and Red Nichols mentioned the high-quality musicians Wills employed in the late thirties and early forties. Listen to Ray DeGeer; Wayne Johnson; Woodie Wood; Jamie McIntosh; Claude "Whoopy" McCray; George Balay; Danny Alguire; Neil Duer; and especially Bob Wills and Betty Wills.

45. Irving L. Sablosky, *American Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), pp. 166–167.

46. Betty Wills.

47. Bob Wills. Edna Wills said that one of the principal purposes in moving the band from Waco to Oklahoma was to develop a big horn band.

48. Quoted in White, "Dave Edwards," p. 6. Johnnie Lee Wills; Son Lansford. See also Bob Wills to Al Stricklin, Aug. 29, 1935. As early as August, 1935, Wills began expanding his organization. He told Stricklin he was not certain whether he would work in his (Wills's) band or a band organized for his father called Young John and his Lone Star Rangers.

49. Ray DeGeer. Also Woodie Wood; Danny Alguire.

50. Eldon Shamblin; Leon McAuliffe; Neil Duer; Jamie McIntosh; Wayne Johnson; Woodie Wood; Bob Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; Alex Brashear; Eldon Shamblin; Smokey Dacus.

51. Claude "Whoopy" McCray, trombonist with Wills in the early forties, said all their ensemble work was written. Wayne Johnson; Jamie McIntosh; Ray DeGeer; Woodie Wood; George Balay; Neil Duer; Alex Brashear; Eldon Shamblin; Bob Wills; Danny Alguire.

52. Sheldon, *Hubbin' It,* p. 140.

53. This sampling includes some transcriptions, air shots, and taped material.

54. The few tapes of Wills's dances that Glenn P. White and other collectors have been able to make available for this study do illustrate more adequately the breadth of his repertory.

55. Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook. The Music Corporation of America began booking Wills in California in 1944.

56. Mason, "Today They Play for Him." See also Bill McReynolds, "20 Million Record Sales Later, Wills Moves Back to Amarillo," *Amarillo Globe-Times,* Aug. 2, 1956.

13

Faded Loves

I miss you, darlin', more and more every day
As heaven would miss the stars above.
And with every heartbeat I still think of you
And remember our faded love.

Bob Wills, "Faded Love"

Musically, the Tulsa years were years of glory for Wills and his Texas Playboys, but the period was not without its problems for the band members collectively and individually. Along with the good times there were petty jealousies, disagreements, and strained relations. A few began to feel they were more important than they actually were; they became temperamental and complained to Wills and to each other about the quality of performance of their fellow musicians. As Wills became more successful and began to hire better musicians, he transferred veteran players out of his band into the minor bands he developed within his organization. These men became bitter, and a few never got over it. At least two complained that they were never paid their share of the commonwealth money, which had built up over the years into thousands of dollars. One of them threatened to sue Wills. The other added that he never knew what happened to the money. "I guess Bob gave it away to his family, I don't know." Still a third member of the band argued that the charges were unfounded, that these men were not of the group that went to Tulsa from Waco and were therefore not in the commonwealth, and that Wills kept them and similar musicians in his organization at a good salary long after they were able to perform at a level adequate to justify their presence in *any* Wills band. Another source of contention was the claim by a few members of the band that Wills kept all the money from record royalties, even though some of his musicians had written music and lyrics for some of the selections. One member said he and Tommy Duncan were ignorant concerning royalties and learned only by talking to musicians during a California tour in the early 1940s that "you can get money for writing songs." When they confronted Wills, he claimed that the royalties were small and that he had

used them for the upkeep of the band. After that, however, they began receiving royalties for any music or lyrics they had written.[1]

Still another note of discord was that sounded by wives and girl friends of band members. In an effort to help the dancers have the most enjoyable time possible, Wills insisted that his musicians smile as they worked, especially when they took a chorus or looked directly at the audience.[2] Often when a musician smiled at a pretty woman, his wife or girl friend assumed (often validly) there was more in the smile than mere showmanship. Most of them were ladies and made no trouble or scenes. Some few, however, reflected the worst of the honky-tonk element where the band played. At least one musician spent most of his Tulsa years living with a common-law wife. Though she incessantly denied this and claimed she and her "spouse" were married, she never produced the proper legal documents. This "marriage" was a source of gossip and amusement for years. The woman threatened to kill her "husband" if she caught him trifling. Her "husband" was a key member of the band, and fortunately she never caught him.[3] He was so afraid of her that he rarely smiled at the opposite sex, despite Wills's complaints and threats. Other members of the band were not kept so loyal by such tactics; the term *playboys* in their case had much more than musical and commercial connotations. Some of the boys yielded to dance-hall temptations and had women scattered over a five-state area. These extramusical, and sometimes extramarital, activities were the source of several outbreaks of matrimonial strife and fewer, though no less serious, outbreaks of syphilis and other venereal diseases in the band.[4]

Though only a few band members indulged in these extramarital escapades, suspicion among wives and girl friends was widespread. Some of the women organized their own "intelligence corps" and secretly went to the dances to spy on their men. As long as this feminine surveillance did not interfere with the musicians' work, the spirit of the band, or business, Wills tolerated it and said little. It all culminated one night at a dance at Cain's Academy. One of the boys in the band smiled at a woman, and his wife, one of the principals in the "intelligence corps," interpreted the smile as part of a relationship that was not altogether commercial, and perhaps recreational. The wife literally jumped onto the suspected girl friend, and the two wallowed, wrestled, and rolled across the dance floor, knocking down a table and several chairs. The wife beat and clawed the suspect brutally before she could be pried away and the foray broken up. The fight was embellished with all the abusive, damning-and-god-damning language that accompanied the honky-tonk angels or tigresses when they were mad, fighting, or drunk (or all three).[5]

Such occurrences were rare at Cain's, and band members and others attached to the Wills organization were rarely, if ever, involved. On this occasion only Bob's anger exceeded his embarrassment. To make matters

worse, the victim was not guilty of the jealous wife's accusations; she was a happily married lady who was a regular customer at Cain's. Moreover, the very presence of the band wives intimidated the musicians; it dampened both their showmanship and their spirit. The married musicians, especially, got to where they sat on the bandstand with long faces, as if playing at a funeral. Wills fumed, "Where in the hell are your smiles? What has happened?" The situation, if unattended, could have hurt business at Cain's and other places. The day after the jealous wife whipped the suspect, Bob called the band members together for a meeting at Cain's. He was as upset and mad as the boys had ever seen him. He cussed and roared that the whole affair had to end and that any man whose wife showed up at one of their dances was fired; that man could go at once and pick up his final check. After that time, about 1940, wives were barred from Wills's dances, and not even Bob's own wife was allowed to attend. Only on special occasions and by special invitation could wives attend a dance where the Texas Playboys were appearing.[6]

Wills's greatest problems during his Tulsa years were not caused by the band members or their wives. They were generally caused by Wills himself. While he was kind and generous to others—band members, family, and even strangers—and tried to help them find happiness, and despite his success as an artist and composer, real happiness eluded him during most of his years in Tulsa. He was unable to untangle his personal life, which had become so mixed up by the mid-1930s. With success and fame came tension, worry, and drinking. Bob drank more, according to Edna Wills, after he began to become successful in Tulsa than he did in those leaner years in West Texas, Fort Worth, and Waco. For three of his nearly nine years in Tulsa, he did not drink at all. But drinking was a problem during the other six. He hated alcohol when he was off it and declared he would never touch it again.[7] His drinking, as always, was periodic. It was not so bad as later in his career, but he missed engagements at times, and the boys told their customers he had the flu.[8] On a few occasions his drunks lasted ten days to two weeks. Rarely, when he got drunk and went to flophouses in Tulsa, John Wills would "go down" and give him a fatherly talk and take him home.[9] Here, as throughout his life, drinking was his main professional handicap and his worst enemy.

Judged by his own moral standards, however, drinking was not his greatest weakness during the Tulsa years. At least this was the opinion of his first wife. According to Edna Wills, "there had always been women"; Bob had had affairs with other women almost from the beginning of their married life, in West Texas, Fort Worth, Waco, and Tulsa. "I could tell just as well when he thought he was in love, because he'd feel so sorry for himself, but it would pass over. And I'd know just exactly when that love affair was over. I didn't say one word to him about it. I never bothered him

about it. . . . He always said, 'Well, I just wondered sometimes if you cared. It didn't make no difference how long I was out or where I went to, you never would ask me where I'd been.' " Edna would answer, "Well, I just felt like if you wanted to tell me, you would, and if you didn't, you wouldn't anyhow." It went on "everywhere—ever so often." In 1935, for instance, Wills thought he was in love with a young Tulsa woman. "Maybe this is it. I thought she was a little old innocent girl. So I asked him to move," Edna remarked. "That's the story of my life. I put up with those women. You don't [know]."[10]

Bob, for his part, complained to his family that his wife was very jealous and that she showed little interest in his musical career and made discouraging remarks about it.[11] With this exception, it would have been difficult for Bob or anyone else to find fault with his first wife. Bob and his relatives knew Edna Wills as a good, faithful wife and a beautiful person.[12] When Bob sued for divorce in 1935, the John Wills family was quite disappointed, and Bob himself had mixed feelings about his decision. Though he tried to tell himself and others that he had acted wisely under the circumstances, his rationalization had a ring of uncertainty. "I think it's worse to raise a child up when a couple isn't happy," he told Ruby. "It would hurt the child worse than to split up and get a divorce . . . than make a child miserable growing up knowing that their parents are not happy with each other."[13]

Though she could easily have obtained child support for their six-year-old daughter, Robbie Jo, Edna did not ask for it. According to Robbie Jo, it was her father who insisted upon it. Although Wills was not legally bound for child support, he knew he was morally bound, and he paid it without fail for more than twelve years. Beyond this, he was always very liberal with his material resources where Edna and Robbie Jo were concerned. "If we needed four or five hundred dollars," Edna remarked, "all we had to do was tell him we wanted it, and we got it." Edna and Robbie Jo lived in Tulsa until 1941, where Bob visited them regularly. "He was never out of our lives. . . . He came back and forth," Robbie Jo said, "and he was a good father to me. All through our lives he was always there, and I knew I had him. . . . He never denied us." Wills paid fifteen dollars a week child support until Robbie Jo finished high school. He then took care of her college expenses until she was graduated from Southern Methodist University. "Each semester when I got my bill, I wrote him or called him," she said, "and he paid my way all the way through."[14]

Though Edna and Robbie Jo were disappointed with Bob and deeply hurt by him, and though they never tried to rationalize what they felt as injustice, they both continued to love him. With great pride they always pointed out his many good qualities. They also pitied him, because they knew he was searching for happiness but did not appear capable of finding

and holding on to it.[15] And their assumptions were apparently valid. The breakup of his first home marked the beginning of the most disheartening and depressing years of Wills's personal life. Between 1935 and 1941, he was divorced five times.

After his nine-year marriage to Edna ended in divorce, Bob married a woman from whom he had taken music lessons. In late 1934, he decided he wanted to take violin lessons and learn to read music. Someone recommended Ruth Elaine McMaster, a concert violinist in Tulsa. Though Miss McMaster's training and experience were in classical music, at the time she was playing more popular music with her "fiddle trio" on KVOO.[16]

Ruth had not met Bob before, and she absolutely refused to listen to his music. She thought his early Tulsa band "was horribly out of tune. When he came on the radio at home, I would say, 'Oh, no! Not that!' It was just terrible." But times were hard for musicians, and she decided to accept the awesome task of teaching violin to Tulsa's most famous musician. Bob took lessons from her for nearly two years. Though it was frustrating at times for both teacher and student, Ruth believed she was able to help him. "His tone was better after that, and his bowing was better." She was amazed at Bob's natural musical talent. "Instinctively, he held his violin very well for a man who had not had training. I don't know where he learned it, but he held it more like a trained violinist [than a country fiddler]. He was a very talented man. Just think what he has done with what little he had. Professional musicians were starving, and he was eating. In fact, he was not only eating, he was making money."[17]

Ruth felt Bob Wills had come a long way since he first brought that "horrible" band to Tulsa. As an accomplished musician herself, she appreciated his contribution to American music. "[Bob] started a trend when he gave a jazz rhythm to the old-time western, hillbilly songs. As the band got better, this is what I began to hear," she concluded. "Bob had a natural genius in his talent. If he had studied music, and musicology, or any theory, harmony, or anything like that, there is no telling what he would have been able to do with it."[18]

Wills's violin teacher not only appreciated her student's talents, she eventually developed a fondness for the student himself. Wills returned her affection, and the violin lessons became more than merely a teacher-student relationship. They began dating in 1935, and in September of that year Ruth and Bob's sister Ruby went with the band to Dallas for Bob's recording session for Brunswick with his Texas Playboys. Ruth played violin in the fiddle ensemble for at least one selection in that session, "Blue River." Ruby described Ruth as "the most beautiful thing with that violin in her hand. She looked like an angel."[19]

When Bob and Ruth returned to Tulsa, the music lessons resumed, and their dating became steady. They saw a good deal of each other until

the spring of 1936. For some reason, they did not see each other for several weeks in the spring and early summer of that year. Ruth thought it was all over. "I went ahead and lived my own life and had been working on my career with my vocal and fiddle trio, aiming toward traveling jobs and big time. We auditioned with every band that came through here. All the big orchestras were coming through Tulsa, playing at the Mayo." In the summer of 1936, Ruth's trio landed a job in Denver at the Brown Palace Hotel. When she returned to Tulsa, she "got a call to come down to the studio. I said, 'Oh, boy—a job.' " When she arrived at KVOO, she found her erstwhile violin student waiting for her. Bob did not mince any words: "I just can't stand being without you." With a ripple of laughter in her voice, Ruth recalled, "That's when we decided to run off and get married, in just two days, and we did." They were married on August 15, 1936, in Sapulpa, Oklahoma.[20]

A little more than three months later, on November 28, 1936, Wills's second wife petitioned for divorce, alleging extreme mental cruelty. This was a brief marriage even by Wills's standards. Though they made a trip to visit Bob's family at the farm in Muleshoe, Texas, the new bride never really got to know the family.[21] Ruby was the one exception. Since his second wife had little experience in housekeeping, Bob wanted Ruby to train her properly, and so she lived with Bob and Ruth a short time. The first lesson involved the art of cooking "Texas-style biscuits." Bob's sister felt that the young violinist made her brother a good wife. "She was good and true to him. I know, because I was with her a good deal." From the beginning, however, Ruby thought the marriage would not be successful, because their backgrounds were completely different: "I don't think she fit into his life." Certainly, Bob did not fit into Ruth's career either, and her family thought she had a promising future in music. "I don't think her folks cared too much for Bob and didn't want her to marry because he had been married," Ruby added.[22] Despite these differences, Bob and Ruth enjoyed a good deal of happiness during their brief marriage, and there were really no serious problems, at least none that should have led to divorce. According to Ruth, he was "very moody" and extremely jealous. "But we hadn't been married long enough for it to have become a real problem." In fact, Ruth was surprised when Wills told her he wanted a divorce.[23]

Their separation in November was probably not entirely a one-sided affair. Nevertheless, Ruth's thoughtful analysis of her husband's attitude toward marriage at that time appears valid, and it is substantiated by evidence from some of his other marriages. "I don't think the man knew what he wanted out of life. Maybe he was a person who was always looking for something," she reflected. "Like the child looking for the star on the Christmas tree, he never could quite reach it. He didn't know what he

wanted. If he got it—no, that wasn't it." Though she could analyze it sympathetically nearly forty years later, at the time she "was deeply hurt, because Bob was my first love." There was a property settlement, and the journal entry of judgment was placed on record December 2, 1936. Bob and Ruth exchanged gifts that Christmas, but his second marriage had already gone the way of his first.[24]

In 1937, Wills began seeing the widow of Milton Brown, the very charming and beautiful Mary Helen Brown. A few weeks later, Wills told her that he loved her, that he wanted to marry her, and that he would try to be a good father to her son. No one, he argued, could love the boy better than Milton's best friend.[25] Mary Helen and Bob were married on January 1, 1938. They moved to a brick home Bob owned on Gary Street in Tulsa. Ruby left the farm in Texas, where she had been living with her father's family, to live with Bob and Mary Helen. Ruby sensed a warmth and love between them that was lacking in her brother's other marriages. In fact, she believed that Mary Helen was one of the few real loves Bob Wills ever had. Other people who observed him at this time came to the same conclusion. "I really think she loved Bob, and he really loved her at the time," Ruby said. She did not have to guess about this; she observed it in their actions and in what they said to each other.[26]

In every respect, Mary Helen tried to make Wills a good wife. "She was good to him, and she was sweet to him. She was a good wife . . . and a beautiful one. She was a good little housekeeper, and she enjoyed it," Ruby said. "She just couldn't wait for Bob to get home. They were together a lot." As far as Bob was concerned, they were never together enough. Though women flocked to the bandstand at his dances, and though some virtually threw themselves at his feet, Bob had eyes only for Mary Helen. "Bob was loyal to her," Ruby concluded, "because he was too crazy about her. He would come straight home as quick as he could get home, in town or out of town." On special occasions Wills loved to surprise his wife with gifts. He came home one night and told her he had something outside that he wanted her to see. Parked in the driveway was a new automobile. "Happy birthday, honey," he announced. "I forget what it was—a Cadillac, Buick, or some big car," Ruby said.[27] Mary Helen recalled that she and Bob just got into the car and talked and laughed. "We had a great time just . . . being together."[28]

The first few weeks they were married it appeared Bob and Mary Helen Wills would have a happy and enduring marriage. A few weeks later it was obvious their marriage would not last. Between 1936 and 1941, Ruby observed her brother's marriages with careful scrutiny. "Bob was mixed up. He seemed to be happy, and he'd give a wife the luxuries and everything he could afford. But I don't know. He was the type that couldn't settle down with one particular one very long." More specifically, she felt,

the jealousy between the two drove them apart. "She was a beautiful woman and he knew it, and he was a handsome man and she knew it." Bob had to be gone almost every night, and Mary Helen was not only aware of his reputation with the opposite sex, she also knew temptations were legion for musicians in the dance-hall environment. By Ruby's account, Mary Helen's jealousy put a strain on their relations, while Bob's jealousy of his beautiful wife was the principal cause of their difficulties. Ruby said that Mary Helen certainly never did anything to give Wills reason to be suspicious. It was "his little old imagination. He was the jealous type. . . . He was just that way even with Edna when he was a young man. It was just something he couldn't help."[29]

Help it or not, Bob's jealousy led him to make unreasonable and foolish demands on his wife. He dominated her life almost entirely. Though he was away from her six nights a week at dances, he rarely allowed her to attend a dance. Though he claimed that that was not a good environment for his wife and that her presence there bothered him in his work, he did not allow her to go other places, places where the ambience was good. Even when Ruby had a date to go to the theater or somewhere similar and asked her to go along, Mary Helen refused, because she knew her husband would not approve. "She was by herself a lot," Ruby said. "Lots of times I didn't go out. I stayed with her. She was young, and she had been used to going. It was a hard life for a wife in that type of life."[30]

It was also difficult for Wills to be away from the woman and home he loved. He had fun and enjoyed an extensive social life, but it was work to be before the public day and night. Because being at home, with Mary Helen and away from the public, was such a refreshing change for him, it was difficult, perhaps impossible, for him to understand how lonely it was for Mary Helen to stay home virtually all the time and to be interrogated suspiciously if she occasionally went out. According to Ruby, her brother did not want Mary Helen and her to go even to a movie or a baby shower for a band wife. On those very rare occasions when she and Ruby did go out, Bob would become moody and suspicious. Or something else might trigger his jealousy, such as his coming home one night to find his wife and Ruby listening to recordings by Mary Helen's late husband, Milton Brown.[31] Though Wills considered Milton his best friend, he knew Mary Helen would never love him as she had Milton. When people referred to her as "Milton's wife," Bob was hurt. Such statements only made his insecurity and jealousy worse. Mary Helen often wished that her famous husband had been as positive with her as he was at his work. "If Bob could have had the attitude at home he had on the bandstand, he would have been fine."[32]

There happened to be iron bars on the windows of their home, and between that coincidence and Wills's domination, Mary Helen felt en-

slaved. She said Bob was a kind, loving, and generous husband. In many ways she could have asked for no better. It was his wanting to dominate her life and his jealousy that caused her to leave him.[33] "That's hard to take when you're really not doing anything wrong," Ruby observed. "I don't think I could stand it too long."[34] Mary Helen had stood it as long as she was going to and feared she might have an emotional breakdown if she tried to live under the pressure any longer.[35] She told nobody except Ruby she was leaving. She called her mother in Fort Worth and asked her to drive to Tulsa and take her back home. Bob knew nothing of Mary Helen's departure. She left quickly, with only her clothing and personal possessions, and returned to Texas. The musicians' grapevine has for years carried the tale that she took all the furniture and household goods when she left. Ruby, who was there at the time she departed, asserted this story is untrue, and certainly, as a member of a very wealthy Fort Worth family, Mary Helen hardly needed to marry Wills for economic reasons. Ruby did not believe that Mary Helen or any other of her brother's wives married him for his money.[36]

When Bob returned home that night, he found only Ruby. He was deeply hurt and disturbed and began to try to figure out why she had left him. When he suggested to his sister that perhaps his wife had found someone else, Ruby told him pointedly that his suspicions were not justified: "I said, 'Bob, as far as I know there has not been any way that Mary Helen has not been true.' "[37]

Bob and Mary Helen were divorced on June 3, 1938, five months and two days after they were married. They were obviously still very much in love. At first they tried to tell themselves that it was best their marriage ended as it did. Both were wrong. Ruby knew their feelings and believed both had been miserable ever since they parted. She knew Mary Helen did not really want to leave and that Bob certainly did not want her to leave. "He was really upset, and I don't think she was much better." Bob went through one of the most miserable periods of his life. Leon McAuliffe observed, "The only time we ever played any sad songs was when Bob was between marriages."[38] Bob also wrote some of his saddest songs then.[39] "I Wonder If You Feel the Way I Do," for instance, which he wrote approximately two months after his final separation from Mary Helen, began:

> Eight weeks ago tonight we parted
> It's so hard to realize we're through.
> When we quit you said you'd always love me
> Now I wonder if you feel the way I do.
>
> I'll never forget our days together
> Even though we know they're very few.
> I loved you then and will forever.
> I wonder if you feel the way I do.[40]

Bob Wills was not content just to write and sing sad songs. He began a campaign to win Mary Helen back. First he called her himself, and when that failed, he called her mother and asked her to explain his feelings and persuade her daughter to return to Tulsa.[41] Ruby said he insisted that *she* call Mary Helen and try to patch up their broken romance. Mary Helen finally agreed. Ruby drove Bob's automobile to Fort Worth and got her. Bob and Mary Helen were married for the second time. "Both were in love and wanted to try again."[42] They knew they had their differences, but there was a beautiful love that bound them. Two lines from Wills's "I Wonder If You Feel the Way I Do" perhaps reflected their feeling:

> It's the strangest and the sweetest love, dear,
> That two people ever knew.[43]

When two people try marriage together a second time, they do have a strange and unusual kind of love, and they desperately desire to make that marriage a success. This was the impression Ruby got when she saw Bob and Mary Helen together again. She felt the same warmth and love between them that she felt when she lived with them after they were married the first time.[44]

Yet they were together only a few weeks. The same problem of jealousy that caused their first divorce resulted in their second.[45] Ruby lived with them only briefly during their second marriage, but she saw them quite often, and Mary Helen confided in her as always. Ruby remembered how Mary Helen "would just cry and say, 'I love him so much, but I don't see how we are going to make it under the circumstances.' " Ruby observed, "He didn't trust her, and she didn't trust him." The tragedy was that neither of them really had any grounds for the jealousy that drove them apart.[46]

According to the court records, they separated again on September 8, 1938. They both obviously made efforts to settle their differences and hoped they could resume their marriage. Mary Helen waited nearly eight months before she filed for divorce on April 26, 1939. The divorce was granted on June 20, 1939, on the grounds of mental cruelty. The failure of this marriage marks a particularly sad and pathetic page in the Bob Wills story because, as his sister observed, Mary Helen was one of the few real loves of his life.[47] In a year and a half, however, they were married and divorced twice, and during those two marriages they did not live together more than a total of seven or eight months. This was the fourth time Wills had tried marriage, and he had failed every time.

Mary Helen was not the kind of lady any man could forget soon—if ever. Wills was "low and blue" for months after they separated. Some of the men in his band, men who had been with him three years and longer, had never seen him take a drink before 1938.[48] His sister, as well as others close

to him, believed the failure of this marriage "caused him to drink more often,"[49] worsening what was already a tragic period in his personal life. Almost a year after his final divorce from Mary Helen, Wills recorded a song which, he tried to tell himself, reflected his feeling for her. By then he felt he was about over the pain of his love and the loss of his beautiful wife. The song, "Time Changes Everything," included these words:

> I thought nothing could stop me from loving you,
> But time changes everything.[50]

But after the song was released, Bob told Mary Helen the lyrics were wrong. Time, he said, had not changed his love for her.[51]

Whether his affections had cooled by 1939 is not certain. In any case, he soon decided to try marriage for the fifth time. Even before he was divorced from Mary Helen in June of 1939, Wills was treading the familiar path to the altar again. He married Mary Louise Parker on July 22, 1939, only one month and two days after his second divorce from Mary Helen was granted. A Tulsa newspaper announced: "Bob Wills Takes Pawhuska Bride as His Fourth Wife."[52] He had begun dating Mary Lou, as he called her, in late 1938 or early 1939. His first letter to her, dated February 24, 1939, makes it obvious that he was quite ambivalent about her young age. "We are going to have to speak to someone about your growing up—that is, in years, I mean. You act the part already."[53] She was only sixteen at the time, and her age both attracted and bothered him. It was one of several things that were to agitate the troubled waters of their marriage, which lasted not quite two years.

Miss Parker, like thousands of other teenage girls in Oklahoma, was a fan of Bob and his musicians. She first became interested in Bob's saxophone player, Charles Laughton, whose age was much closer to her own than Wills's was. She and Laughton had arranged an informal Coke date for a dance the band was to play in her hometown, Pawhuska. During the dance that night, Bob called Mary Lou to the bandstand and informed her that Laughton had left the band that day but that he would be delighted to drive her home at the conclusion of the dance. Thus began a courtship that involved not only Wills and Mary Lou, but her parents as well. At first William Parker and his wife disapproved of their daughter's seeing the famous and oft-married bandleader. During visits to their home, Wills took more gifts to Mrs. Parker than he did to Miss Parker. His presents, showmanship, and goodwill won parental approval of his courtship. Most of their dates were on Sunday at her parents' home, but some were at his dances.[54] On those few occasions, Wills would go miles out of the way to take her to and from his dance, and during the dance, he would make a special effort to show her he was performing and singing for her.[55] While many women virtually threw themselves at Bob at those affairs, he

gave his attention almost completely to her. Sixteen-year-old Mary Lou saw him as a star and her dates as glamorous.

Mary Lou believed that Wills decided to marry her before he really knew her, before he ever took her home that night. "He never changed his mind. He decided to do something, and he did it. He had a one-track mind. . . ." Mary Lou thought Bob believed he could make her into the kind of wife he wanted after they married. Those who knew him best then, his family, friends, and business associates, all mentioned how impulsive, how impetuous he was. Acting without thinking plagued him all his life, but it was a special problem in his marriages and divorces in the 1930s and early 1940s. "He married an ideal instead of a compatible person," Mary Lou said. "He didn't take marriage that serious. At the time, he *was* serious. Each [marriage], this was it. This was the thing he wanted. . . . But it never lasted for him because he always married for the wrong ideas or wrong reasons." Bob wanted, perhaps above all else, a happy marriage and a family, but he lived in a dream world and would not face the realities of life—at least so his fourth wife thought.[56]

According to Mary Lou, there was virtually no courtship. Wills was so afraid of the scandal of being alone with a sixteen-year-old girl that he either saw her in the presence of her parents on Sundays or took one of his sisters or someone else on their dates. He often phoned her. His telephone bill was $150 a month, Mary Lou said, "and that was a time when rates were low." They also kept in touch by mail. Between February 24, 1939, and their marriage in July of that year, Wills wrote her seventeen letters, an average of nearly four a month. They were filled with such romantic expressions as "Am glad to know that you love horses . . . We had a good crowd at our dance . . . How are things in Pawhuska . . . Give my regards to your mom and dad . . . How is school this week? . . . About Johnnie Lee's tough luck. He broke his ankle." Perhaps there were more ardent overtones in "Won't be long until swimming days are here again." But the most amazing of all was "As far as what we were talking about last night is concerned . . . I will call you soon and tell you more about it."[57] That statement, believe it or not, referred to their wedding four days later. Actually, Bob's secretary, Ada Perry, wrote all these letters for him, and, as Mary Lou remarked, "Ada wrote a very unromantic letter." Bob also communicated with his future bride through his radio broadcasts. He would sing "My Mary" or "Mexicali Rose" or "Rosetta" or some other song "for Miss Mary Lou Parker in Pawhuska" and add, "I hope you're listening, honey." Their romance, if one could call it that, was "very platonic," Mary Lou concluded.[58]

Bob perhaps mistook Mary Lou's indifference for maturity. If it were possible, she was as immature as Bob. She had grown fond of a boy who was studying at the Naval Academy; she wrote him she was going to marry Bob,

even before they planned to marry, just to try to make the young man jealous. "I am telling you this," she explained, "to show you what an immature person I was. I never really and truly was in love with Bob. At the time I would have told you I was, and I thought I was." Bob was at the "charming peak of his life. There wasn't a woman in Oklahoma he couldn't have gone with, married, or had." Mary Lou married Bob strictly because he wanted her to marry him; she felt greatly flattered.[59]

The first pressure their marriage faced came from Bob's attempts to make Mary Lou fit his concept of the ideal wife. "At this time he was on the virgin bit," she said. He decided that to have a "happy marriage, a perfect marriage," she continued,

> he should marry a girl who was absolutely, completely innocent and train her in his way. Then she would always just be the kind of wife that he wanted—which doesn't work either, you know, especially if you pick one that is so completely [immature]. . . . I was a sheltered girl, and he sheltered me in the same way my family did. So I had no way of growing up, and that doesn't make for a wife. . . . He sat down and taught me how he wanted me to be, just like you would teach me French or something in degrees and lessons. Every gesture that turned him on, to the particular way you crossed your legs or held your hands or wore your clothes . . . everything. . . . There was one in particular, I won't get into quite how personal it was, but I couldn't get one movement just like he wanted. So there was a girl that danced at the club, and he said, "I'll take you to the dance, and I want you to watch her dance, and when we come home I want you to do what she's doing."[60]

Wills's schooling of Mary Lou included matters of "sex and marriage." She was quick to add there was nothing wrong with this, nothing sordid at all: "he didn't mean it that way." Mary Lou found it fulfilling at the time, but upon more mature reflection she concluded that Bob was acting out of fantasy. "He was making an ideal woman. He was taking a woman, the raw material, and putting into her mind and her knowledge the training and ideas of everything he had ever enjoyed of every woman he had ever gone with. And he saw no reason why he couldn't do this. He left out everything that makes you what you are or what you can't change or that you have a personal world."[61]

Fantasy or not, in his attempts to achieve this goal, Wills felt he must both dominate and shelter his young bride. This led to unhappiness almost from the beginning of their marriage. Mary Lou naturally assumed that her husband would continue taking her to his dances, that she would continue enjoying a life of glamour. Johnnie Lee summed up Mary Lou's attitude (as well as his brother's approach to marriage): "Bob was easily swayed to something, and one or two [wives] thought it'd be just bright lights." Bob had seen enough honky-tonk angels; he wanted a wife and a home, so he informed his new bride she could go to his dances only once in

a while. Such a demand of a seventeen-year-old girl was ill-advised enough,[62] but Bob demanded she stay home virtually all the time. He told her she could not be the kind of wife he desired if she associated with some of the people at his dances, where her presence would be like a "rose among thorns."[63] Furthermore, he told her she was better than most of the people at the dances and also most of the band members' wives. He allowed her to have only a few friends. "I could buy a new dress every day. He didn't care what I paid for it, he thought it was cute. But I was never allowed to go anywhere to wear 'em," Mary Lou complained. "If he could have put me into a little box and put me on a shelf when he went to work, he would have been perfectly happy."[64]

Nearly all Bob's wives complained of this overpossessiveness and the strange and almost comical things it led to. For example, Wills was susceptible to "colds, pneumonia, and hangovers" and was often sick. When he had "any one of the three" he went to bed. "And I went to bed," Mary Lou continued. "I had to stay in bed until he got well. If my family came down or his family came over, and Bob came in from the broadcast, and he was going to take a nap, well, I didn't stay in the living room and visit . . . and play hostess. I went in there and took a nap when he took a nap and left you sitting in the living room. You were supposed to understand this. And everybody that was around Bob did understand it." She noted that the whole affair was not without humor. Tommy Duncan told her once, "You know, Mary Lou, I've seen you in bed more than I have ever seen you out."[65]

Another reason for his domination, closely allied to his efforts to develop an ideal wife, was Wills's jealousy. Bob had a deep distrust of women, particularly those who frequented dances. Over the years he had seen so many women at dances make eyes at, flirt with, and even proposition him and his musicians that he lost confidence in most of them.[66] Some were wives of their best friends. Such incidents, as well as his general insecurity, help account for his jealousy. Four of his five wives emphasized this trait, and two pronounced him "insanely jealous."[67] Others knew of this, and his own brothers made it a practice never to go to his home if he was away. Johnnie Lee observed that while Bob went out of his way to take women places *before* he married them, the "doors were locked" *after* he married them.[68] One of Bob's former wives told how Wills cursed and ranted even over the presence of an old man she employed to put house numbers on their home. On another occasion, becoming jealous of the boy who brought their groceries, he made an embarrassing scene over a grocery delivery.[69] Mary Helen cited Bob's jealousy as a principal reason for their divorce, and Mary Lou was quoted as saying he continually accused her of infidelity.[70] No available evidence indicates that any of his five wives was guilty of such a charge. In spite of the plausible explanations,

it is still puzzling that Wills would have been jealous and insecure in matters of marriage, because in so many ways he and his wives were quite compatible. Two of his wives stated explicitly that he was a "great lover."

During most of his years in Tulsa, Wills's personal life was filled with misery. Mary Lou said he had periods of deep depression. His secretary, who enjoyed talking with Bob very much, recalled that during conversations he would change from a happy and jovial mood to one of anger or depression. A sister said Wills was very moody during this period.[71] This was true in most of his personal relations, but especially in his marital life. Three of the four women he was married to in the 1930s gave this as a principal reason their marriages failed.[72]

"At times he would come in and be very happy, and everything would be beautiful," Mary Lou remembered, "and within a moment's notice he could change to a great depression." This started shortly after they were married and got progressively worse. Even as a young bride, she was aware that a person in show business, like her husband, was nearly always under a great deal of strain. "Emotions were something he lived through twenty-four hours a day. I realized later on that he would have had to let the personality down. He had a strong personality on the bandstand, but he couldn't stay on that high all the time. He had to let down, and at home is where he did it. I can look back now. I couldn't see it at the time." Besides worrying about the band, crowds, payrolls, travel, and other show-business pressures, Bob was sensitive about coming from a poor background and, especially, his lack of education. He attained fame quickly and "was thrown with people of college degrees and different social background," Mary Lou observed. "He constantly worried about whether he would do the right thing or say the right word. When I was married to him . . . he would take the dictionary at night, and he would hear a new word, wouldn't know its meaning. . . . Yet," she added, "I've never seen him make any blunders in his social [life]. But he had this insecurity that you have when one hasn't education." Because of the constant strain, both real and imaginary, his moods of depression were easily triggered. "He could be sitting here talking and you could be perfectly happy. And you could say one word or do one expression that would hit him the wrong way, and he would change over," Mary Lou recalled. "Then he would become very negative, would begin to talk about not wanting to be married or getting a divorce. . . . It was very hard for Bob to think positive."[73]

Ruby observed essentially the same moodiness the various times she lived with him. One day he would be very happy and insist that she stop everything else and just talk with him. On those occasions he was an amiable conversationalist. "Then, at times, he would come in and just be mad. Everything would be wrong." She said it was never so hard on a sister as it would have been on a wife. Once, nevertheless, in the early hours of

the morning, he got so negative that Ruby gave him a piece of her mind and walked a few blocks to Johnnie Lee's home, where she spent the rest of the night. Bob was there early the next morning to apologize and beg her to return. Perhaps better than anyone else, Ruby summed up her brother's moodiness. "He always had it in his mind that he wasn't happy. I don't know whether he wanted to make himself unhappy, or he really was unhappy, or he'd get to drinking and think he was unhappy. At times, especially if he was married, he wasn't satisfied. I don't know what the deal was. Maybe he wasn't [happy]. Maybe he never did want to be married, and yet he did."[74]

If Mary Lou and Ruby's analyses are correct, it is amazing that Wills could have projected such a remarkable personality on the bandstand and become so successful in show business. The negativism that periodically characterized his personality at home fortunately did not prevail in his professional career. Though he was often moody in private life, he was generally much more positive, optimistic, and pleasant in public life. Mary Lou described the drastic shift best: "When Bob walked out on that bandstand, he just changed personality completely. He was in another world, very confident. It was like a magnetic field when he walked on the bandstand."[75]

This duality helps explain why Wills was so unsuccessful in love and marriage during this period. According to Mary Lou, the dynamic personality he projected while he performed drew women to him, but those he married were disillusioned and distressed when he brought a different personality home.[76] It was his bandstand magnetism that had drawn the young girl he married in July, 1939. "This part of his life I was attuned with. . . . His work, I understood, . . . and this was something he would talk to me about. The other I didn't understand too much. . . . I never really entered into the other world with him, his personal world. I stayed in his music world."[77]

Mary Lou and Bob were sexually compatible. "We had a great deal of physical combustion between us. I was drawn to him that way. And to me, that was love at the time. . . . it wasn't a lasting thing, but it was very strong. There was no way our marriage could have worked. . . . I use to think it was his hours or was this or that." But their marriage was not based on the things that make for a solid foundation and lasting love. She thought she was marrying the magnetic showman who made thousands happy daily with his lilting music and positive personality. She neither understood nor respected the other Bob Wills, the husband with his moodiness, his depression, his jealousy, his possessiveness. "When I was married to him, I listened to him on the radio. . . . I thought he played beautifully; I thought he did everything fine; I thought he had showmanship. I never thought of him as my husband. I never put the two men together. Even when I was

married to him, I was still a fan. That's why I say I was a better fan than I was a wife."[78]

At times Mary Lou dreaded Bob's return home, because there he was rarely the man she loved and respected while he was on the air. All his former wives affirmed he was a different man in his personal life. There were, of course, happy and beautiful moments. But the fact that he could not live with any of three wives more than four or five months at a time between 1936 and 1941 is telling enough.

That Bob's personal problems in this period were legion is obvious. One of them stemmed from his impulsive nature and was expressed in his quick and what at times appeared as thoughtless decisions. In personal matters, he appeared to proceed with undue haste and lack of deliberation. Even more unfortunate, he often seemed to think of himself and what he wanted, without enough consideration of how his decisions would affect other people. Those who knew him best denied he ever hurt anyone intentionally. Mary Lou summed it up: "He was just a person of moods." And because of his moods and rash decisions, "he hurt lots of people."[79] Those close to him used the word *impulsive* again and again. This accounts, in part, for his many marriages and divorces. If he decided to get married, he did so with little serious deliberation, and if he decided to get a divorce, he did so. He went into one of his moods and announced to one wife of less than four months, "I have been true to you, but I know I won't be. So I want a divorce."[80] Though he tried to appear thoughtful and honest, there was little in this action that reflected more than a whim, certainly little that demonstrated consideration for another human being.

Mary Lou pointed out that his wives and children were not the only victims of his moods and impulsiveness. His own father's family, which he had helped so much, often felt it. For example, when Mary Lou and Bob married, they planned to live in a little house he owned on First or Second Street in Tulsa, rather than at his ranch house in north Tulsa. Before he married he had lived there with his father's family and other relatives, and he intended for his mother and father and the others to stay on. But while he and Mary Lou were on their honeymoon in Oklahoma City, he decided to move into the Big House at the ranch. Ruby remembered it was "a mess." Bob called his father from Oklahoma City and "told them all to move, we will move in in three days," Mary Lou said. "He put Mr. and Mrs. Wills down in the little house, and he moved Johnnie Lee and Irene out of it up into the Big House." He moved two of his sisters, Alga and Ruby, and Ruby's two children into an apartment he rented for them. "This is the way Bob did things. He thought in terms of the lord or cattle baron."[81]

This was the image and attitude Wills projected. "He furnished the money, and everybody did what he said. You did things Bob's way." The whole affair caused a family row and left the in-laws "absolutely furious."

Mary Lou claimed he ran the band that way, too. "He interfered with their personal lives. He told them what they could do and what they couldn't do . . . whether it interfered with their marriage or not."[82] Other evidence indicated Wills was very considerate of his band members and their families. In fact, one member's wife felt that Wills was the most considerate bandleader they ever worked for.[83] Mary Lou contended he was "just really demanding" of the band members. "He would interpret it as doing what's best for them. But really it came down to telling them."[84]

Wills and his newest bride moved into the Big House at the ranch in north Tulsa in late July of 1939. Though they shared many happy hours, their marriage soon began to go the direction of Bob's previous marriages—toward misery and failure. His dual personality, which led to abrupt changes of mood, and his general insecurity, which led to jealousy, possessiveness, and domination, soon became frustrating for a young bride of seventeen. This was the case not just with Mary Lou; two of his earlier wives, both of them older and more mature, agreed that when Wills yielded to the various pressures in his life, he became very negative and unhappy, almost impossible to live with.[85] Mary Lou, though, did not blame her husband altogether. "I was an insecure person and I was also very sensitive." When Bob became negative, she "was negative with him." This led to quarrels, and the quarrels to fights. "I was high tempered, and he was, too, so on that plateau our faults were the same. When we had one, we had a good one." These fights were strictly verbal, and only Mary Lou showed a violent nature. "We would have temper fights. . . . In fact, I broke all the dishes in the kitchen one time, and he didn't buy me any for two days." Young as she was, Mary Lou had no fear of her older husband. He would never have harmed her physically during their quarrels. But she thought he might, and her warning to him against it revealed something of her own nature: "I called his hand, and I told him that if he ever hit me, I didn't believe this thing of getting drunk and not remembering. I said, 'If you ever hit me, you had better do a good job of it, because there is no way I can whip you. But so help me, someday you'll go to sleep and I'll go into the kitchen and get the iron and break every finger on your hand. And then I'll leave, because they won't send me to the penitentiary for that. If I kill you, they would.' " As one who played the violin for his livelihood, Wills must have gotten the message and probably slept with one eye open for the next few nights. Mary Lou boasted, perhaps with a good deal of truth, "I think I'm one woman who was a threat to Bob. I think I'm the only woman he never mastered. And to a man like Bob, that is a threat. I never needed him."[86] Clearly, Bob's wife was not a defenseless young girl.

One night, about the middle of October, 1939, Wills went home drunk. It had been about nine or ten months since they first began seeing each other, and in all that time Mary Lou had never seen him touch alcohol

in any form. Needless to say, they had one of their worst "temper fights" when Wills entered the Big House. At that time in his life Wills got on what Mary Lou called "running drunks." She explained, "When Bob drank, he drank for a long time, and that's when he wanted to take off and wanted to go. He would drive; I couldn't drive. So he came home drunk, and I was terrifically upset. So he talked me into going to Texas with him . . . to meet his friends and family." They ran from North Central Texas to the Texas Panhandle. They went to Paris, Memphis, Lakeview, Turkey, Quitaque, Lubbock, and other places in West Texas. They were gone about two weeks, and Bob was drunk the whole time. When they returned to Tulsa, Bob and his father had a terribly embarrassing quarrel. His young bride was trying, without success, to cope with something she had never been around. She began to consider leaving Wills shortly after they reached home.[87]

On November 8, 1939, little more than three months after their vows, the marriage of James R. and Mary Louise Wills was annulled. One can find evidence indicating that both parties wanted the annulment, though there is little doubt that Mary Lou initiated the actual proceedings. Mary Lou's account: her husband's lawyer came to their home on November 7 and informed her, "Bob has decided that he doesn't want to be married any longer. So I am to take you to Pawhuska and get an annulment." "Fine! If he doesn't want to be married any longer, I don't either." This was the first time she had heard of any such annulment; she and her husband "had not had a word." The lawyer took her and her mother, who was there on a visit, to Pawhuska. Wills's lawyer "had always handled Bob's divorces, and they always just 'done them up.' And so he went in there and took my mother with me. He got the annulment."[88]

The newspapers gave a different view altogether: "Mrs. Mary Louise Parker Wills, announced . . . that she was granted an annulment Tuesday. . . . Sunday night Miss Parker said, she became a member of the First Baptist Church here. When she returned home and told Wills what she had done, Wills, she said, was 'so opposed to it' that he told her she would either have to get an annulment or withdraw her membership." Another article told the same story. A third read as follows: "In November they were estranged when she joined the First Baptist Church of Tulsa and because she was under age, she was granted an annulment of their marriage." Still another gave this account: "She told of the separation and how she was induced to have the marriage annulled."[89]

Judge Hugh C. Jones granted the annulment on November 8, 1939. At the time, Mary Lou was apparently satisfied with the annulment and the $500 settlement and with being free from Wills. Later she claimed the annulment was illegal because her mother never signed it representing her and because she was a minor and Wills's lawyer represented both parties.

She reflected on the whole episode, "If Bob decided to get married, he got married. If he decided to get divorced, he got divorced. He was not in the mood to be married any longer. Really, that is all it had to take with Bob. He didn't go into those deep things about working out things . . . or decide if you could make it or not."[90] One need merely examine the court records to see that this analysis of Wills's attitude concerning marriage in the 1930s and early 1940s has a good deal of validity. In this particular case, however, it is reasonably clear that it was his wife who instigated the annulment. The evidence also strongly indicates that she had, at best, a flimsy basis for such action. If she had no grounds other than Wills's complaint about her joining a church, it appears that it was she and not Wills who acted on a "whim of moods."

Two days after the annulment was granted, Mary Lou learned she was to become a mother. Her family doctor told her she would have to inform her husband. She refused: "I had no desire to go back to him." Then both her doctor and her lawyer told her she had to see Wills and the annulment had to be set aside. The child could not have a legal name with an annulment; there had to be a divorce. Mary Lou then went to Tulsa to see Wills at his noon broadcast. "Bob wouldn't talk to me. He just whizzed by me into the office. So I sat down and started crying." Leon McAuliffe went over to ask what was wrong with her, learned about the baby, and reported to his boss. According to Mary Lou, Bob then rushed out and told her he was happy that he was to become a father and that they "would go back together." He took her "out to the house and told his mother and the family that he was going to be a father, . . . just thrilled over it." Bob then sent his wife back to Pawhuska, where he was to get her in a few days.[91]

Mary Lou thought that she and Wills had agreed to have the annulment set aside. She instructed her attorney to file a petition to vacate the decree. Wills either changed his mind after their visit at Cain's, or she misunderstood his feelings. His history during this period suggests he changed his mind. In any case, Mary Lou learned a few days later that he had had his attorneys file to contest the setting aside of the annulment. The hearing was set for April 2, 1940. Why it was to be held five months after the original hearing is not clear. Wills hired David Randolph Milsten, one of the finest lawyers in Tulsa; W. S. Hamilton and Matthew Kane of Pawhuska; Fred and John Tillman, criminal lawyers, also of Pawhuska. The famous bandleader and his retinue of legal minds made an imposing sight as they entered the Osage County courthouse, which overlooked Pawhuska. Evidently Bob and Mary Lou had not seen each other in nearly five months. "In the meantime," she said, "they told him all I had done was decide I had not gotten enough money." Wills probably had serious doubts as to whether or not his wife was pregnant and suspected the whole affair was a financial shakedown. A Tulsa newspaper caption may have ex-

pressed his thoughts: "Former Wife of Bob Wills Seeks New Settlement."[92]

The hearing turned into a comic opera. Only two witnesses were heard, Dr. Roscoe Walker and Mary Lou Wills. The doctor testified that "Mrs. Wills was expecting a baby in June." Evidently Wills and his lawyers were still not convinced of her pregnancy, so Mary Lou was asked to take the stand. Wills's group decided that Fred Tillman should cross-examine her. Mary Lou knew that the Tillmans were southerners and sarcasm was their courtroom tactic:

> I knew Bob, and they didn't. And I knew them, and he didn't. . . . I was sitting in control. I knew that all I had to do was keep my voice to a monotone and say yes and no, and they would flip him out. They would try to make you lose your temper. That was the way that they operated, and of course, I had been raised around that courthouse, and I knew them. . . . So Mr. [Fred] Tillman began insinuating that it wasn't Bob's child. And he went on and on, and I'd say yes and no. He'd say, "You don't love him," and I'd say, "Yes I do." . . . and the more I'd keep the monotone the madder he would get . . . the deeper his insinuations would get. So about that time Bob had had it. I knew this side of him. And all I had to do was sit there and play them against each other. I knew what Bob would do. I knew there was no way he would let me take that kind of criticism.[93]

Bob jumped up and shouted at the lawyer, "You shut up. You can't talk to Mary Lou like that. I won't have it." This outburst by Wills resulted in Judge Jones's calling for order and a brief recess so that tempers could cool. Mary Lou leaned over the table and whispered something to Bob. A Pawhuska newspaper reported that "attorneys on both sides of the counsel table conferred and Mr. and Mrs. Wills retired to the privacy of the judge's chambers for a conference."[94]

During the fifteen minutes Mr. and Mrs. Wills were in conference, pandemonium broke out inside the courtroom and reached a climax near the courtroom door just before the proceedings resumed. An acquaintance of Wills's from Tulsa, who had encouraged him to contest the vacating of the annulment, "popped off about me," Mary Lou said, "and my daddy knocked him down the steps."[95] Some semblance of order was settling across the district courtroom when Mr. and Mrs. Wills, according to the newspaper, "emerged hand in hand smiling happily. They whispered to their attorneys and counsel immediately notified the judge they had reached an agreement and asked that the annulment be set aside."[96] Bob had whispered to one of his lawyers, "She's going to have a baby. Call the whole thing off."[97] The courtroom began to get noisy again, and the judge called for order. "Judge Jones gave a brief lecture on the foundation of the American home and the love of one man for one woman and ordered the annulment be set aside." After his lecture, the judge ordered

Wills to pay attorney fees of $250 to Floyd Yarbrough, counsel for Mrs. Wills. As an anticlimax, he fined Bill Parker, Mary Lou's father, twenty-five dollars for contempt of court for striking the man earlier near the courtroom door.[98] Bob jumped up, paid the fine for his father-in-law, and declared, "It's worth twenty-five dollars to see him hit for talking about Mary Lou." Bob and Mary Lou then walked out of the courtroom, hand in hand, and went to her parents' home to look at baby clothes.[99]

The newspapers embellished and dramatized the whole affair even more. A Pawhuska paper proclaimed in big, heavy type: "Bob Wills and Wife Reunite in Courtroom Reconciliation." The *Tulsa Tribune* outdid all others with this soap-opera caption: "Unborn Child Reunites Wills and His Bride." The *Tribune* account ran: "The influence of an unborn child reunited the home of Bob Wills, Tulsa 'cowboy band' leader." The story in the Pawhuska paper concluded, "The hearing ended shortly after noon with Mr. and Mrs. Wills and Mr. and Mrs. Parker reunited in a happy family group."[100]

It was implicit from these accounts that the writers, judge, and everyone else at the hearing hoped the couple would live happily ever after. They did not. But they did manage somehow to remain married for the next thirteen months, which was a record for Wills since his first marriage, which ended in 1935. Mary Lou remained at her parents' home in Pawhuska until July 25, 1940, when the baby was born, a girl with beautiful dark eyes and dark hair like her father's. Bob and Mary Lou chose a pretty name for her from one of their favorite songs, "Rosetta."[101]

Bob Wills was happy to be reconciled with his young wife. Whatever the earlier limitations in his marital life, his motives were admirable this time. In August, 1940, his wife and their infant daughter moved back to Tulsa and the new home Bob had bought for them, a little Cape Cod cottage with walls painted in the most up-to-date pastels. Some of its features were so advanced they had to sign an agreement to show it to people interested in purchasing a similar dwelling. Bob and Mary Lou shared many happy and precious moments in that cottage. They played with little Rosetta and watched her grow. They loved to talk about music, the band, the broadcasts, and the dances; and believe it or not, they never grew tired of listening to the recordings of their favorite orchestra, Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys. Bob and Mary Lou listened to each new release admiringly and critically. Mary Lou took an interest in his music and business and hardly ever missed one of his broadcasts, whether at noon or midnight. Except for Rosetta, nothing Bob and Mary Lou had in common could match their love for his music.

Mary Lou enjoyed more social freedom than at any other time in their marriage. As Bob's popularity grew, the two of them attended more parties and functions honoring his achievements. Mary Lou bubbled with

pride when she took Rosetta to the airport to welcome her husband home from movie-making in Hollywood or a recording session in Dallas.[102] Sometimes hundreds would be there with her to greet Tulsa's best-known citizen. Above all, she loved to go to the Rialto Theatre, where Bob's movies generally premiered, sit through one of them two or three times, and enjoy a brief personal appearance by her famous husband and his band between showings. In terms of Wills's music and professional achievements generally, this was perhaps the greatest period of his life. It was at this time that he made his first movies, had his best band, and cut his most successful recording, "New San Antonio Rose" (all to be discussed in detail later). One thing that made all this success so wonderful, according to Mary Lou, was that it never affected her husband. He was always very humble, and he never spoke of his achievements. Mary Lou felt Bob never realized how great he really was.[103]

Yet destiny itself seemed to be against their marriage. They sincerely wanted a happy home and marriage, and they tried—perhaps neither of them hard enough—to overcome their faults. However, a few weeks after they resumed married life and moved into their new home, the same problems that had separated them before began to trouble them again. Both Bob and Mary Lou knew she was erratic, insecure, and spoiled. She was constantly threatening to go home to her mother when things did not suit her fancy. Mary Lou stated frankly that she shared equal blame for the failure of their marriage. "I was probably just as immature as he was demanding or possessive. I was just as fickle or indifferent to the relationship as he was. . . ." To Mary Lou, grounds for divorce would involve physical abuse or adultery, neither of which occurred in their marriage. "He was good to me, and when I went to get a divorce, I didn't have any grounds." She spoke pointedly about adultery: "I'll say this for him, if there were other women during my marriage, I didn't catch on to it, I wasn't aware of it. Our problem wasn't other women."[104]

According to Mary Lou, their problem was Wills's drinking and his periods of deep depression. It was difficult to separate the two. Depression nearly always accompanied his drinking, but he was often depressed and negative when he had not had a drink for days. When Mary Lou returned to Tulsa in the late summer of 1940, Bob's drinking had become a habit.

> It was something that came and went. It was not *how often* he drank, because Bob didn't drink often. It was *how he drank* when he drank. . . . He would go maybe six weeks, three months. Like I said, the longest I know of was six months without taking a drink at all. . . . Then when he took one drink, I would not see him. If he was five minutes late coming home from the dance, I knew to just pack up and go home because I wouldn't see him for a week or two. He didn't come back, he went to a hotel room and just lay there completely sick.

Ordinarily he went to the best hotels, the Mayo or the Tulsa. There were other times, "when Bob would change or go into this other world he lived in. He would go into the gutter." Then he would end up in the dives and dens and cheap hotels on First Street. Ordinarily he did not get into trouble or make any scenes. If he did, he had two friends on the police force who "were good about keeping everything from the newspapers. . . . Lots of things never got into the newspapers."[105]

Late one night in the winter of 1940, Bob was loud and making trouble in a First Street bar. The bartenders probably could not locate the friendly policemen, so they called Mary Lou and asked her to come after him. She in turn phoned a black man who worked for Bob and asked him to take her down to the bar. "This colored man went in ahead of me. People just made a path for us. I went in after Bob . . . and said, 'Come on, let's go,' and he said, 'Don't you want something to eat,' and I said, 'No!' He said, 'Why not?' I said, 'It's too dirty in here,' and he said 'O.K.' " They went uptown to Bishop's, "which at that time was one of the nicest places in Tulsa to eat. We sat down, and he ordered and he said, 'She wants a steak,' and they said, 'What do you want?' And Bob said, 'Not a damn thing. It's too clean in here.' "[106]

When Wills was drinking, he usually lacked such a sense of humor. "His personality changed," Mary Lou recalled. "He changed completely when he would drink from when he was sober. . . . That was when his real, real negative side would come out. He would see the dark side of everything, of everybody."[107] He would talk about not wanting to be married. "He could see no future. He always pointed that out." Whether he was drinking or not, he could become moody and show signs of jealousy and insecurity. "He would be sitting here and we would be happy. And maybe he would start like this. 'You're seventeen and I'm thirty-four. In ten years you'll be twenty-seven and I'll be forty-four, and I'll be old and you'll still be young, and you couldn't possibly love me then.' Then he would build that into a deep depression and just go on with it."[108]

These moods of depression were often accompanied by feelings of guilt, especially when Wills was drinking, drunk, or getting over a drunk. Mary Lou believed that the old adage—"A drunk man speaks a sober man's mind"—often applied in Bob's case. If so, he was miserable and sad a great deal of the time. His guilt ran the gamut of things he had done since his young manhood. For example, in 1929 he was driving the car (some have said while he was drinking) that overturned and killed his sister's husband, Oce Sullivan. Though many people close to him made excuses, he always felt he was at fault and tried to atone by providing financially for Ruby and her two children.[109] He was too sensitive and had too much sense of responsibility to dismiss it as an accident.

Wills obviously never believed he had been fair to Ruth McMaster,

either. He realized she was deeply hurt when he told her he wanted a divorce after less than four months of marriage. He often made quick decisions that hurt people he loved, but he never forgot quickly that he had injured them. Though Ruth remarried about eight months after their divorce and was happily married for more than thirty-five years, Bob's sensitive conscience never let him forget the injustice he believed he had done her. He spoke highly of Ruth, respected her, and, according to his fourth wife, "looked up to her." It was when Bob was drinking, Mary Lou pointed out, that he would discuss such things.[110]

Some of Wills's deepest guilt in the late 1930s and early 1940s concerned his first wife and child. "He talked about Edna a lot," Mary Lou said. "I think he had a great deal of guilt complex where she was concerned. She went through the struggle with him, and they separated about the time he got where things were good [financially]." Doubtless, one reason Wills drank was to escape the pain of guilt. But under the influence of alcohol, the torment was worse. Perhaps, however, talking about it and making confessions helped him. "When he drank, he talked about Robbie Jo a great deal," Mary Lou said. "I know one thing I remember in particular. Mother does, too. Once he was very drunk and he told us about dreaming about her. He thought he saw her sitting on the floor eating paper." Wills was, of course, aware that Robbie Jo was completely unhappy with the separation. "When she was with her mother, she wanted her father. When she was with her father, she wanted her mother." Wills remained kind and helpful to Edna and their daughter after the divorce, and he gave them money and bought them automobiles and even helped buy them a home; he was always aware of the sorrow he had caused in their lives.[111]

Considering the kind of life Wills had lived, it is interesting that he also felt guilty about not entering the ministry. "He was very religious in his mind. And that was another thing, now, that he talked about when he was drinking, was religion. That's what bore on his mind very deeply." Religion was not something that bothered him just when he drank. He talked about it a good deal on more sober occasions—so much, in fact, that Mary Lou believed he was called to preach. So did Bob, and he never gave up that belief. He was knowledgeable about religion and he "read the Bible all of the time. . . . The only two books I ever saw Bob read was the dictionary and the Bible." Bob respected lofty morals and religion, though he often did not practice either of them; and though he was a Baptist, he rarely, if ever, attended church. Nevertheless, Mary Lou said, "I knew how deeply he wanted to preach."[112]

This abiding desire perhaps accounts for his devoting one program a week to religious music. "One of his best programs, you know, every Wednesday he had religious songs. There was a great deal of feeling in

them when he sang them. He felt them. Bob did everything with feeling."[113] Those Wednesday broadcasts were made up exclusively of hymns. The repertory from Wednesday, July 31, 1940, is typical: "In the Sweet Bye and Bye" (vocals by Tommy Duncan), "When the Saints Go Marching In" (vocal quartet), "Farther Along," "Just a Little Talk with Jesus," "Vacant Chair" (vocals by Joe Ferguson), "Old Rugged Cross," "God Be with You Till We Meet Again."[114]

In 1940, a very well-to-do and prominent woman in Tulsa business and social circles, along with several clergymen, began to pray that Bob would become a preacher. Their prayers were almost answered. "He came to me and told me that he had decided to give up the band and he was going to go back and preach," Mary Lou said. "I was a kid, I was willing to go along with him. If he wanted to give up the band and preach, it didn't make any difference to me.... At that time I was very religious." The dance-hall fiddler left home that day sincerely bent on quitting show business and entering the ministry. His friends and associates "pointed out his responsibility to that one and this one," and Bob dropped the matter.[115] In the early 1960s, he asked Eldon Shamblin to find a devoted minister he could work with in religious service. When Shamblin replied he did not know of one as devoted as Wills wanted, he again let the matter drop. Shamblin believed Bob "never got over the idea of becoming a minister." In the more than two years I interviewed Wills, he spoke several times about preaching. During one of our last interviews, in late 1973, he identified one of the mistakes of his life as not heeding God's call to preach.[116]

Admirable as his aspirations were, Wills never did what in his own mind and conscience he thought he should. Failing to preach, failing to attend church, and failing to live by his own religious and moral standards became sources of self-condemnation, depression, and guilt. This brought misery to himself and those around him, especially his wives. He was not really opposed to Mary Lou's joining the First Baptist Church in Tulsa, for he respected churches and organized religion. It was the publicity surrounding the event that bothered him, the way their personal lives "hit the newspapers." Domineering as he was, he was probably angry because she had not asked his permission. Moreover, he probably felt guilty that his young wife had done the thing his conscience told him *he* should do.

Wills also questioned if he was doing right playing for dances. Ruby heard him complain about this many times. He would say, "I see people on the dance floor. I see a big crowd dancing. Here I am standing up here making the music, and they're out there, and some of them might be drinking and dancing and all this and that. I feel like I'm sinning or causing other people to sin." Ruby and others would remind him he was just entertaining and that "if your thoughts are right and you feel right, what

they do, you can't help. They don't have to come to your dances." Bob would answer, "Yeah, but I feel like if I wasn't doing that, they wouldn't. I can't feel like I can belong to a church and be in the line of business I'm in."[117] He never believed that the dance-hall environment was conducive to the good life and, especially, to making a proper home. This was another reason he refused to allow his wives to attend regularly. He did not even like his sisters and other female relatives to appear, especially if they were married. As late as the mid-1960s, when a niece attended one of his dances, he inquired, "Honey, where is your husband?" When she answered, "At home with the children," Wills admonished, "You'd be better off there yourself."[118]

As discussed earlier, the band played for many funerals during the Tulsa years, 1934–42. After they had played, boarded the bus, and driven away, Bob often got the attention of his musicians: "Boys, we ought to get into a better and more useful business than we are in. Can't we do something else to make a living?"[119] Without any compensation Wills had gone to a good deal of trouble, and often to considerable expense, to help a bereaved family. In this humble way he helped so many people, and yet he could not think positively about it. Even after practicing Christianity, he went away in self-condemnation. Some of the boys on the bus thought, perhaps, that it was just talk and that he would soon forget it. He did not. It was always part of Bob Wills's trouble in mind.

In the spring of 1941, Mary Lou decided to leave her husband. Wills's drinking, depressions, jealousy, and personality problems in general, coupled with his wife's immaturity, fickleness, and her own personality problems, had not produced a happy or stable marriage. They had their times of happiness to the very end, but as Mary Lou complained, "We lived in complete happiness or complete unhappiness. But I never knew when it was going up or coming down." It was a two-way street, and Bob never knew what to expect either. The problem, according to Mary Lou, was that even when they were happy, she lived in fear that he would suddenly change. "I did not know what would be next. . . . I anticipated that it might be fine, and it might not. I couldn't handle the pressure." Her doctor told her to leave her husband, that if she did not, she would have a nervous breakdown within six months. Furthermore, she did not intend to stay with Bob, because she "would never put up with a person who drank." She knew they could not make it together. "I had to make a choice between her [Rosetta] and him. I had seen that." This was the mind of Wills's eighteen-year-old wife in early 1941.[120]

Bob Wills's fourth wife left him late in February, 1941. Bob and the band went to Dallas for a recording session on February 25, and she said her good-byes without a hint that she would not be there when he returned. "Just as soon as he left, I called the moving van at home and packed

up everything in the house but his clothes. Now, this was where I was wrong," Mary Lou admitted. "I moved everything out of the house but his clothes and took it with me and talked to him every night and never told him I'd left him and let him come home and find it like that." Whenever Bob was out of town, Mary Lou went to her parents' home in Pawhuska, so Bob knew where she would be. "He called me every night. I didn't have nerve enough to tell him I had left him. . . . I couldn't bring myself to it." She was always sorry for her actions in that case: "It was cruel. I realized that later. This was the only way I could make the break."[121]

Wills talked with his wife the night before returning home, and he still did not realize what had happened. When he arrived at his little cottage on that windy March afternoon, he was shocked. He found nothing but bare floors, and his clothes in a closet. He was no doubt deeply hurt when he realized what had happened. Nevertheless, he tried to persuade his wife to bring their baby and come home, in hopes of working out their differences. She refused and soon after filed suit for separate maintenance (later changed to a suit for divorce). The newspapers, as usual, made great sport of Wills's situation. One caption read: "Crooner Hits Another Sour Note / Wife Sues Bob Wills." On May 15, 1941, at the start of the noon broadcast at Cain's, Deputy Sheriff Nate Martin "served him with summons out of the Osage County district court, where Mrs. Wills has sued for separate maintenance." The report continued,

> In addition to separate maintenance of $200 a month, Mrs. Wills, the former Miss Mary Louise Parker of Pawhuska, is asking possession of the Wills' home at 3632 E. Archer St., their furniture, a 1940 LaSalle automobile, custody of their small daughter, temporary support, attorney's fees and court costs. . . . Mrs. Wills alleged her husband is guilty of extreme actual and mental cruelty; that he curses her and abuses her in private and public, that he "falsely" accuses her of infidelity, that he is "non-communicative, sullen, and irritable," and spends a great deal of his time away from home. . . . [In] her last petition, Mrs. Wills charges that her husband "is not a fit and proper person" to have custody of their daughter.[122]

These allegations were much more severe than those related later, when tempers had cooled, opinions were more mature, and alimony had been paid. In fact, a year after filing suit for separate maintenance, Mary Lou wrote Bob, "I still think you are one of the sweetest guys I have ever known." Seven months later she wrote, "Bob if you can forgive me and forget the past. . . . I still love you as much as I did the day I married you. . . ."[123]

The divorce was granted on June 3, 1941, on the grounds of gross neglect and extreme cruelty. The court awarded Mary Lou "custody and possession of Rosetta Wills, the minor daughter of the parties." The court also ruled that Wills pay his wife $4000 alimony plus $50 monthly support

for their daughter. Rather than pay the alimony in installments as the judge had ruled, Wills paid the $4000 at once in open court.[124] His wife had originally sued for their home, but did not get it in the final settlement. Shortly after the divorce was granted, however, Mary Lou said Bob offered to give their home to her and Rosetta—in spite of the cruel way she treated him when she left, and in spite of the admittedly false accusations she made against him in the newspapers. Bob Wills had his faults, but vindictiveness and maliciousness were certainly not among them.

Mary Lou turned his offer down, though, because she thought it best that she and Rosetta leave Tulsa. They moved to Pawhuska and lived with her mother and father. A few years later, Mary Lou remarried and enjoyed a very long and happy marriage. Rosetta lived with her grandparents in Pawhuska until she went to college and then married. Her grandmother Parker managed to save a good portion of the fifty dollars Wills provided each month and used that money to send Rosetta to college. Mrs. Parker always defended Bob, even in the problems that led to her daughter's divorce, and made excuses for him when he failed to visit Rosetta. Occasionally, when Bob played dances in or near Pawhuska, he went to visit the Parkers and Rosetta. On other occasions he played within four blocks of the Parker home and neither called nor visited his daughter. It was heartbreaking for little Rosetta when her playmates would enthusiastically say, "Oh! Your daddy played here last night! Did you see him?" Though she had waited up past her bedtime, hoping he would come to see her, she would have to answer with a plaintive and weak "No, I didn't get to see him." Rosetta admired and loved her father but felt she never really got to know him because of the way he neglected her.[125]

Thus ended the fifth marriage Bob Wills had in less than six years. Much of his personal life in that period was filled with misery and sadness, largely of his own making. From 1935 through 1941, his periodic drinking, his constant moodiness, his incessant jealousy, and his abiding insecurity were crowding out most of his happiness. He was in an almost impossible situation. Because he was insecure, he drank. When he drank, he became drunk and even more ashamed of his life. Being ashamed made him feel more insecure. The cycle worsened from 1938 to 1941. Several of his musicians had never seen him touch alcohol before 1938; Mary Lou said he dreaded drinking and fought it. When he tried to escape his miserable personal life by drinking, he found himself more and more the prisoner of it.

Music and performance provided another avenue of escape, but music did not make him its prisoner. It became his servant and liberated him, if but for a few hours each day, and gave him some of the only genuine happiness and fulfillment he ever knew. It is difficult for one who has studied his life to believe he enjoyed much real happiness at this time

apart from his performing. Mary Lou focused on a significant key to his success: "When Bob walked on the bandstand, he just changed personality completely. He was just in another world, very confident."[126] Strange as it appears, it is possible that had Bob Wills had a different personality and been happy and secure in his personal life, he would never have achieved what he did in American popular music.

Five times Bob Wills had tried marriage and failed. Those years, 1935 to 1941, were some of the most disheartening and depressing of his life. He could not be successful in what he wanted most—love and a family. Interestingly, these were his most productive and creative years as an artist and composer. While he was at his lowest in many ways, he rose to the top in his field. No other period in his career even compared with it.

As he faced the summer of 1941 alone, his wife and another family gone forever, he wondered if somewhere, sometime he would find that certain woman who would love him so deeply and sacrificially that she would understand and perhaps even appreciate his strange and ever-shifting personality. In the summer of 1941, this looked impossible. Bob had already given up, and by then all his marriages were faded loves.

1. Confidential communication. The lines from "Faded Love" are quoted by permission of Chappell Music Company.
2. Al Stricklin; Leon McAuliffe; Wayne Johnson; Johnnie Lee Wills; Bob Wills; Ray DeGeer; Smokey Dacus; Danny Alguire; Son Lansford.
3. Bob Wills; Mary Lou Cloud; Betty Wills; Edna Wills; Al Stricklin.
4. Al Stricklin.
5. Ibid.; Johnnie Lee Wills; Leon McAuliffe; Mary Lou Cloud; Edna Wills; Robbie Wills Calhoun.
6. Betty Wills; Mary Helen Brown; Mary Lou Cloud; Al Stricklin; Robbie Wills Calhoun; Bobbie Taylor; Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House; Lerlene Stout; Luke Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills.
7. Edna Wills; Mary Lou Cloud; Robbie Wills Calhoun; Johnnie Lee Wills; Leon McAuliffe; June Whalin; Kermit Whalin; Betty Wills.
8. Al Stricklin; Leon McAuliffe; Sleepy Johnson; Eldon Shamblin.
9. Herman Arnspiger; confidential communications. Also Mary Lou Cloud.
10. Edna Wills.
11. Johnnie Lee Wills; Ruby Wills Sullivan.
12. Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House; Johnnie Lee Wills; Luke Wills; Lorene Wills Burton.
13. Ruby Wills Sullivan.
14. Edna Wills; Robbie Wills Calhoun.
15. Edna Wills; Robbie Wills Calhoun; Ruby Wills Sullivan. Edna Wills was quite candid in her interview with me regarding her life with Wills. The interview, in this respect, proved much more valuable than the essay she prepared for me entitled "What I Know about 'Bob Wills.' " Also Mary Lou Cloud; Johnnie Lee Wills; Eloise Wills House.
16. Ruth Downing.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.; Ruby Wills Sullivan; Al Stricklin; Leon McAuliffe; Sleepy Johnson; Herman Arnspiger.

20. Ruth Downing.
21. Ibid.; Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House.
22. Ruby Wills Sullivan.
23. Ruth Downing; Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House.
24. Ruth Downing.
25. Mary Helen Brown.
26. Ruby Wills Sullivan; Marvin Montgomery; Eldon Shamblin.
27. Ruby Wills Sullivan.
28. Mary Helen Brown.
29. Ruby Wills Sullivan. Mary Helen told me she was never jealous of Bob in any way.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.; Mary Helen Brown.
32. Mary Helen Brown.
33. Ibid.
34. Ruby Wills Sullivan.
35. Mary Helen Brown.
36. Ruby Wills Sullivan.
37. Ibid.
38. Leon McAuliffe.
39. Even at this time he was reluctant to record many songs with sad lyrics, though he did record "Yearning," "You Don't Love Me," "The Convict and the Rose," and "I Knew the Moment I Lost You."
40. Quoted by permission of Chappell Music Company. Wills recorded "I Wonder If You Feel the Way I Do" in Dallas on November 29, 1938. With the help of Tommy Duncan, he had written the lyrics about five o'clock that morning. Bob referred to this incident in "A Tribute to Bob Wills," KBBQ, Burbank, Calif., July 31, 1972. I also found the lyrics scribbled on four sheets of stationery from the Jefferson Hotel in Dallas.
41. Mary Helen Brown; Ruby Wills Sullivan.
42. Ruby Wills Sullivan. There is an oft-told story that winds through the musicians' grapevine in which Bob got drunk and woke up married the second time to Mary Helen. Bob himself allegedly told this tale. If he did, it must have been in jest, for Ruby asserted the story is entirely false.
43. Quoted by permission of Chappell Music Company.
44. Ruby Wills Sullivan.
45. Mary Helen Brown.
46. Ruby Wills Sullivan.
47. Ibid.
48. Leon McAuliffe; Smokey Dacus; Al Stricklin; Son Lansford. Also Edna Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills.
49. Ruby Wills Sullivan; Edna Wills; Marvin Montgomery; Leon McAuliffe; Eloise Wills House.
50. "Time Changes Everything," words and music by Tommy Duncan. Copyright renewed 1968, Red River Songs, Inc. Used by permission of Johnny Bond. Wills and his Texas Playboys recorded "Time Changes Everything" on April 15, 1940, in Dallas.
51. I am indebted to Mary Helen Brown for her help in this part of the Bob Wills story. She is now a successful businesswoman. In September, 1972, despite a very busy schedule, she kindly took time for a taped interview regarding her life with Milton Brown. Then, and again on January 15, 1975, she talked at length regarding her two marriages to Wills.
52. "Bob Wills Takes Pawhuska Bride as His Fourth Wife," *Tulsa Tribune,* July 25, 1939. See also "Crooner Hits Another Sour Note: Wife Sues Bob Wills," ibid., May 15, 1941.
53. Bob Wills to Mary Lou Parker, Feb. 24, 1939.
54. Ibid., Mar. 7, 17, 28, May 10, 23, 31, 1939. Mary Lou's mother often went with her to Wills's dances. On June 6, 1939, Wills wrote Mary Lou, "How did your mother enjoy herself at the dance last night?" Listen also to Rosetta Wills Arnett.
55. Johnnie Lee Wills; Mary Lou Cloud; Rosetta Wills Arnett.
56. I am in great debt to Mary Lou Wills Cloud for taping a very helpful interview during

the 1973 Christmas holidays. She also helped me secure letters, diaries, scrapbooks, newspaper material, and photographs.

57. Bob Wills to Mary Lou Parker, Mar. 17, 28, Apr. 4, May 3, 10, July 18, 1939.

58. Mary Lou Cloud; Johnnie Lee Wills; Ada Perry; Ruby Wills Sullivan; Rosetta Wills Arnett.

59. Mary Lou Cloud. Herman Arnspiger said Wills was so popular that some women actually pulled him off the bandstand and tried to take him outside to their automobiles. Often Wills resisted, but not always.

60. Mary Lou Cloud. Wills told his sisters he married a young woman so he could train her up to his liking. Listen to Ruby Wills Sullivan and Eloise Wills House.

61. Mary Lou Cloud.

62. Mary Lou was sixteen when Wills first began dating her, seventeen when they married.

63. Bob Wills evidently told each of his wives that she was a "rose among thorns" and made essentially the same rule about his dances for all of them. See "Bob Wills Week Is Set Aside," *Tulsa Tribune,* Jan. 10, 1970; "Bob Wills from the Cotton Patch to 'Playboys,' " ibid., Jan. 17, 1970

64. Mary Lou Cloud.

65. Ibid. Ruby Wills Sullivan also observed that Bob insisted his wives take a nap when he did, even if it came at a time when she should have been attending to household chores or entertaining guests.

66. Leon McAuliffe; Al Stricklin; Eldon Shamblin; Ruby Wills Sullivan; confidential communication.

67. Listen especially to Ruth Downing; Mary Lou Cloud; Mary Helen Brown. Also Betty Wills.

68. Johnnie Lee Wills.

69. Confidential communication.

70. Mary Helen Brown; Mary Lou Cloud; "Crooner Hits Another Sour Note."

71. Mary Lou Cloud; Ada Perry; Ruby Wills Sullivan.

72. Mary Lou Cloud; Ruth Downing; Mary Helen Brown.

73. Mary Lou Cloud. Listen especially to Ruby Wills Sullivan and Mary Helen Brown.

74. Ruby Wills Sullivan.

75. Mary Lou Cloud. Also Ruby Wills Sullivan.

76. Mary Helen Brown made a similar distinction between Wills's personality on the bandstand and his personality at home.

77. Mary Lou Cloud.

78. Ibid. Also Rosetta Wills Arnett.

79. Mary Lou Cloud. Also Ruby Wills Sullivan; Mary Helen Brown.

80. Ruth Downing.

81. Ruby Wills Sullivan; Mary Lou Cloud.

82. Mary Lou Cloud.

83. Mrs. Jamie McIntosh. Also Jamie McIntosh; Woodie Wood; Glenn Rhees; Wayne Johnson; Eldon Shamblin; Al Stricklin; Smokey Dacus; Sleepy Johnson; Danny Alguire; Laura Lee Owens; Herman Arnspiger.

84. Mary Lou Cloud.

85. Ibid.; Ruth Downing; Mary Helen Brown.

86. Mary Lou Cloud. Ruby Wills Sullivan said of Mary Lou, "She was the one he couldn't conquer."

87. Mary Lou Cloud. Ruby Wills Sullivan also spoke of this and similar incidents in her brother's life.

88. Mary Lou Cloud.

89. "Fourth Wife of Bob Wills Wins Freedom," *Tulsa Tribune,* Nov. 9, 1939; "Former Wife of Bob Wills Seeks New Settlement," ibid., Apr. 2, 1940; "Crooner Hits Another Sour Note"; "Bob Wills and Wife Reunite in Courtroom Reconciliation," *Daily Journal-Capital* (Pawhuska), Apr. 2, 1940.

90. Mary Lou Cloud.

91. Leon McAuliffe; Mary Lou Cloud; Ruby Wills Sullivan; Rosetta Wills Arnett.

92. David Randolph Milsten; Matthew Kane; Mary Lou Cloud; Johnnie Lee Wills; Eloise Wills House; Ruby Wills Sullivan; Rosetta Wills Arnett; "Bob Wills and Wife Reunite"; transcript of D[ivorce]-6893, District Court, Osage County, Pawhuska, Okla.; "Former Wife Seeks New Settlement."

93. Mary Lou Cloud. Mary Lou's father was a policeman in Pawhuska for many years. As a child she spent many hours playing in and around the Osage County courthouse, which was about a block from her home.

94. "Bob Wills and Wife Reunite."

95. Mary Lou Cloud.

96. "Bob Wills and Wife Reunite."

97. Confidential communication.

98. "Bob Wills and Wife Reunite."

99. Mary Lou Cloud.

100. "Bob Wills and Wife Reunite"; "Unborn Child Reunites Wills and His Bride," *Tulsa Tribune,* Apr. 3, 1940. See also "Former Wife Seeks New Settlement."

101. Mary Lou Cloud; Rosetta Wills Arnett.

102. Ibid.; Rosetta Wills Arnett Scrapbook; Phillip Banister Scrapbook.

103. Mary Lou Cloud. Ruth Downing referred to Wills's humility almost in Mary Lou's exact words. Also Sam Gibbs.

104. Mary Lou Cloud.

105. Ibid.

106. Ibid.; Ruby Wills Sullivan.

107. Ibid. Ruby said her brother had a "split personality when he was drinking."

108. Mary Lou Cloud.

109. Ibid. Ruby described this wreck as an accident that could have happened to anyone, though her brother could never quit blaming himself for it.

110. Mary Lou Cloud. Wills's sister Ruby observed the same manifestations of guilt in her brother when he was under the influence of alcohol.

111. Mary Lou Cloud.

112. Ibid. Ruby told me her brother talked a great deal about religion when he was drinking. She added, "He loved sacred songs. When he'd be drinking, that's all he'd want to sing or hear, and that's all he'd want to talk about."

113. Ibid.

114. See Ruth Thomason, "Journal." When Wills and the band were gone, the program was generally made up of their recordings. There were no hymns on those occasions. Wills recorded only one hymn, "There's No Disappointment in Heaven." While his 1936 recording of it was never issued, that of 1964 appeared on *Bob Wills Keepsake Album No. 1,* Longhorn LP-001, and on *The Bob Wills Story,* Starday SLP 469.

115. Mary Lou Cloud.

116. Eldon Shamblin; Bob Wills. Rosetta Wills Arnett said her father often discussed religion and preaching with her grandmother, Mrs. Bill Parker.

117. Ruby Wills Sullivan.

118. Lerlene Stout; Mary Lou Cloud. Also Lorene Wills Burton; Bobbie Jo Taylor; Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House.

119. Al Stricklin; Leon McAuliffe; Eldon Shamblin; Smokey Dacus; Ruby Wills Sullivan; Mary Lou Cloud; Betty Wills.

120. Mary Lou Cloud.

121. Ibid.

122. "Crooner Hits Another Sour Note."

123. Mary Lou Wills to Bob Wills, May 19, Dec. 16, 1942.

124. "Wills Pays $4000 Alimony After Wife Wins Divorce Here," *Daily Journal-Capital* (Pawhuska), June 4, 1941.

125. Rosetta Wills Arnett; Phillip Arnett. See especially Mary Lou Wills to Bob Wills, May 19, Dec. 16, 1942. In both these letters Mary Lou made a special effort to persuade Bob

to visit their daughter. On December 16, she wrote: "Bob, I wish you could see Rosetta. I know you don't feel very close to her, but after all you are her daddy and we have taught her to love you. . . . Bob if you might want to see her, you are welcome in our home, there is no hard feeling with me or the folks or any of the family. . . . If you would come and see her this would be the nicest Xmas present she could ever get."

126. Mary Lou Cloud.

14

"San Antonio Rose," Western Swing, and Some of the Finest Jazzmen You've Ever Heard

Deep within my heart lies a melody,
A song of old San Antone.

Bob Wills

So what, just another success story. Not at all. . . . This band pockets . . . some of the finest jazzmen you've ever heard.

Metronome, April, 1941

Although Bob Wills's personal life was often filled with misery and disappointment, he and his Texas Playboys had achieved a great deal since they began in Waco in 1933. However, they probably would have remained a band with little more than regional appeal, and most of what they had attained might have been forgotten, had it not been for an incident in the spring of 1940. At the time, it appeared insignificant, but it turned the Tulsa years from what Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys would have remembered as good years into what Al Stricklin called "the glory years."[1]

In November, 1938, in Dallas, Wills and his Texas Playboys had recorded a piece they called "San Antonio Rose," with "a fiddle lead and a steel guitar lead in the middle."[2] The recording was the nearest thing to a really big hit that Wills had ever had. Had it been left in the form in which it was originally recorded, it would have been remembered as a very fine fiddle recording, perhaps Wills's best. But the tune was good enough to attract the attention of some people in the profession who saw its potential. Jazz violinist Joe Venuti, for example, told Wills and members of the band that he had had many requests for it and that Wills needed to do more with it.[3]

Interestingly, it was not anyone in the West, where the music was born, who saw the possibilities, but Irving Berlin, Incorporated, in New York City.[4] Very early in the spring of 1940, Fred Kramer from that distinguished firm called Wills in Tulsa about publishing "San Antonio Rose." Bob and his band were on tour, and O. W. Mayo was handling the radio

shows by playing their recordings. Kramer found out from Mayo that the composition had never been published and that they "were interested in a publishing contract." Kramer offered to fly to Tulsa if he could see Wills and close the deal. In a few days, he called again, to inform Mayo he was flying to Tulsa the next day. The next morning he called again, and Mayo told him that Bob had the flu, but he "could see him if he came on." Fred Kramer arrived that day, and he and Mayo went out to the ranch, where Wills was sick and in bed. Bob had the music written out. Berlin's representative looked it over approvingly, then asked, "Where are the lyrics?" Bob told him there were none; it had been recorded as an instrumental. Kramer said he thought his company might be interested in it only if there were lyrics. He agreed to give Wills $300 advance royalties if Bob would agree to provide lyrics and would sign a contract giving Irving Berlin, Incorporated, the publishing rights. Bob's lawyer prepared the contract, and Bob signed it. It was understood that all of this was contingent on the approval of the company officials in New York. In other words, "if they liked it."[5] The easterner was on his way back to New York in a few hours with "San Antonio Rose." The rest of the story is one of success, with a sprinkling of comic opera.

Bob had insisted on the $300 advance in order to encourage Berlin "to do something with the song." Ironically, Bob was the one who had to do something with it—add the lyrics.[6] As it turned out, this was one of the most important things he ever did in his entire career, and had it not been for the Irving Berlin firm, he probably would never have done it. Sleepy Johnson, Everett Stover, Tommy Duncan, and others in the organization got busy and helped Wills write words for "San Antonio Rose." Tommy Duncan came up with some verses first, but they were rejected almost entirely. According to most of the band members, Everett Stover was more help to Wills than anyone else. When Wills finished the lyrics, he sent them to Irving Berlin. No great to-do was made about all of this. Neither Bob Wills nor any member of his organization had any idea the old fiddle tune with lyrics would make musical history.[7]

More important to Wills at the time, he had to get the band ready for a recording session with Columbia on April 15 and 16, 1940, in Dallas. The band did not make any recordings in 1939; their last session had been in November, 1938. Wills's Texas Playboys had grown to a big swing band by 1940, and that session included eighteen musicians: Bob Wills and Jesse Ashlock, violins; Tommy Duncan, vocals; Leon McAuliffe, steel guitar; Louis Tierney, violin and saxophone; Eldon Shamblin, electric guitar; Johnnie Lee Wills, tenor banjo; Herman Arnspiger, guitar; Son Lansford, bass; Al Stricklin, piano; Everett Stover and Tubby Lewis, trumpets; Wayne Johnson, saxophone and clarinet; Zeb McNally, Tiny Mott, Joe Ferguson, and Don Harlan, saxophones; Smokey Dacus, drums. This was the largest Texas Playboy band Bob Wills ever used in a recording session

and, if success is a safe barometer, his best. In fact, Wills had one of the largest swing bands in the nation in 1940. Glenn Miller used, including himself, only thirteen musicians in his recording of "In the Mood," fourteen in "Sunrise Serenade" (1939), seventeen in "Tuxedo Junction" (1940) and "String of Pearls" (1941). Harry James used fourteen in "Two O'Clock Jump" (1940); Tommy Dorsey had seventeen in "Swing Low Sweet Chariot" (1941); Benny Goodman had seventeen in "Benny Rides Again" (1940); Artie Shaw used only six in "Summit Ridge Drive" (1940).[8]

The band that Bob Wills took to Texas in April, 1940, was the band "he built for himself."[9] It could do anything he wanted a band to do, as the discography for that session reveals. Four frontier fiddle tunes were recorded: "Lone Star Rag," "I Don't Lov'a Nobody," "That Brownskin Gal," and "Blue Bonnet Rag." From blues and race music there were "Corrine Corrina" and "Bob Wills Special." For variety, "A Medley of Spanish Waltzes" and "There's Going to Be a Party." Noticeably absent were any dixieland jazz selections. The jazz was still there, but it was no longer the primitive jazz of their 1935 "Wang Wang Blues." Like other dance bands of the thirties, Wills's music had moved to another form of jazz, swing.

The swing-band recording of "Big Beaver" in this 1940 session completed the evolution of Bob Wills's music. He had learned the tune as a boy, as an old Negro cotton picker hummed it in a primitive form.[10] The rhythm and the blues of this and other Negro folk music he learned during his childhood he incorporated with frontier fiddle music. He took that blend to Fort Worth, formed his own group, and played a new kind of dance music. In Waco and Tulsa he continued to add to his band and to his music, always seeking a style that would express his soul. He had begun his career with his fiddle and a guitar in 1915. Twenty-five years later, with an eighteen-piece orchestra, he could do what he had dreamed he might do. In Dallas that day in 1940, he lowered his fiddle bow, and the band played the old Negro's tune in the most up-to-date style.[11] If Wills had not hollered, the listener would never have known he was not listening to one of the more orthodox swing bands of the time.

The real importance of that session, however, lay in one of the last selections they recorded, right after "Big Beaver." Like "Big Beaver," it was a straight swing piece, all horns. One wonders if Bob Wills did not just throw it and "Big Beaver" in at the end, knowing, or at least thinking, that Art Satherley and Columbia would not release either of them. Heretofore, Columbia had generally left such things "in the can," unreleased. But here was an eighteen-piece orchestra on salary; why not let them have a jam session? Their last recording was the selection Wills had recently written lyrics for and sent to Irving Berlin, "San Antonio Rose." Because it had been less than two years since they recorded the original "San Antonio

Rose," and because they were adding lyrics, they called it "New San Antonio Rose." It was new in every way except the melody. "Originally," Leon McAuliffe said, "we recorded it with a fiddle lead and a steel guitar lead in the middle. 'New San Antonio Rose' had neither."[12] They did not use a violin or any other stringed instrument, except a guitar (and most swing bands of the period were using a guitar). The recording sounded just like all the other contemporary swing bands.

"New San Antonio Rose" was, in every sense of the word, pop music.[13] Had Tommy Dorsey recorded it just as the Texas Playboys did, it would have been remembered as a "popular song." However, despite the fact that only brass and reeds were used in the recording, it became known as "western music." Why? Because it was associated with Bob Wills, who played and used "western instruments" in his band. Though some critics had, up to 1940, tried to relegate his music to the category "hillbilly," only the most naive would do so after his recording of "New San Antonio Rose." Wills was too near the big bands in style, in repertory, and in purpose—to provide music for dancing—not to be recognized as part of the swing tradition. Yet his use of stringed instruments kept him from being a purist, like Goodman or Basie. With his big orchestra he could record "Big Beaver" and "New San Antonio Rose" and many other selections that compared favorably with any dance music of the period.[14] Nevertheless, in the same session, there was still the frontier fiddle music, such as "Lone Star Rag" and "That Brownskin Gal." He played both "swing" and "western."

Trumpeter Jamie McIntosh, who left the Ben Pollack swing band to join Wills, said there was a great deal of similarity in the style and quality of those two bands. One principal difference lay in Wills's use of the fiddles and of western, or more folk-rooted, music. McIntosh felt western swing was the result of Wills's "incorporating jazz with western music." Wayne Johnson, who played saxophone in the recording of "New San Antonio Rose," explained better than anyone else why the terms *western* and *swing* were brought together to describe the Bob Wills style. "It was during the late thirties and early forties you had the Goodmans, the Shaws, the Dorseys, and the rest. That was the Swing Era, and the people were swing dancing. That was the name of the thing. In the Bob Wills band, we did exactly the same thing with a western flavor. We were still playing the same kind of beat, the same kind of arrangements and everything else." But, he added, "Bob also had the western flavor, because of the fiddles, the steel guitars, the costumes. All of this naturally made it western. But it was still swing. So it was called western swing."[15]

Bob Wills often remarked that "New San Antonio Rose" was "the song that took him from hamburgers to steaks." This was not exactly true, but this recording of it was probably the most important single occurrence in

his career.[16] An immediate hit in most commercial fields of American popular music, it won Wills a gold record in 1940. Columbia's other gold record award for that year was Frank Sinatra's "All or Nothing at All."[17]

Between 1935 and World War II, Wills recorded more than two hundred selections, but this *one* recording did more for him than most of the others combined. Without it, most of the others would have been forgotten, and probably Wills and western swing would have gone into oblivion also. Certainly his music would have remained provincial, unknown beyond the Southwest. "New San Antonio Rose" made Wills and his Texas Playboys national figures in American music. "New San Antonio Rose" was the biggest-selling record Wills ever cut. He made several subsequent recordings of "New San Antonio Rose," but none that even compared with this 1940 original. Every member of his band interviewed agreed this was the best performance of the song. Tommy Duncan could never sing it again like he did on the original, though he sang it hundreds of times and recorded it several times during the next twenty-five years. Everything—the brass, the reeds, Duncan's voice, the rhythm section—all blended perfectly that day in Dallas. Nothing seemed underplayed or overembellished. Some of the members of that band had been together for nearly a decade, others since 1934, most of them since 1935–36. All their efforts reached a culmination in their recording of "New San Antonio Rose."

Meanwhile, back in New York, "San Antonio Rose" was not selling very well at all for Irving Berlin, Incorporated. When that distinguished firm received the music and lyrics from Wills, they evidently thought the song would never sell in its original form. They asked for permission to "rearrange the song to make it a more commercial number."[18] Saul H. Bornstein, Berlin's treasurer and general manager, wrote of his reaction to Wills's recording of "San Antonio Rose": "I realized that it was foreign to the every day popular song, nevertheless, I thought it had that certain something that would stand out and we would have very little trouble in selling the idea to the orchestra leaders and singers. . . . To my amazement," Bornstein continued, "we just could not get to first base." He wrote Wills's attorney on August 9, 1940, "We have shown it to about twenty-five different prominent orchestra leaders and radio vocalists, but could not get a ripple. . . . However," Bornstein added, "they did suggest that in its original form they would not be interested in it, but if we would modernize it, or whatever you call it, they would be interested in it. And that is the reason we suggested the change and went to the expense of printing it up, etc."[19]

Bornstein was referring to the changes his firm had made in both the music and the lyrics of "San Antonio Rose." Berlin published its version as " 'San Antonio Rose' by Bob Wills." The lyrics describe a prairie moon hanging low, while the singer addresses the stars above about his

sweetheart of the Alamo. He assures her that he will be riding back to her when his roundup chores are finished.[20]

The Berlin firm's lyrics and music may or may not be good—but they certainly do not sound like the original Wills composition. Wills's attorney, David Randolph Milsten, wrote several letters in an effort to get the New York company to publish the music and lyrics as Bob originally wrote them. On July 16, 1940, he wrote, "Mr. Wills did not contemplate such a radical change in the tune as has been made. According to Mr. Wills the original tune has been abandoned and the song has been revised so that now all that is heard when playing the piano score is harmony to the original melody." Milsten further complained, "You have so changed the words and the tune that the patrons and fans of Bob Wills will not accept the song. Mr. Wills now almost continually has embarrassing moments when his Orchestra plays the song as published because his patrons refuse to dance to the tune and call for the original to be played and the original words to be sung." Even after he received this letter, Bornstein continued to believe that Wills's desire to publish the song as he wrote it was unwise. "I don't know whether it would be better in the original form," he wrote in August, "but I am inclined to believe, having had twenty-five years of experience in this business, that it would be more acceptable in the corrected form."[21]

Bob Wills and his attorney could not accept the opinion of the New York music publisher despite his experience of twenty-five years. Milsten argued pointedly, passionately, and persuasively in behalf of the original "San Antonio Rose." On August 13, 1940, he wrote Bornstein that he thought Bornstein understood the secret of the song's appeal and quoted the part of Bornstein's letter which reflected that understanding: "I realized that it was foreign to the every day popular song, nevertheless, I thought it had that certain something that would stand out. . . ."

"That certain something" was in the original interpretation, and without it, "San Antonio Rose," as revised by the Berlin firm, was "just another simple song of which there are hundreds on the market," Milsten explained. "Bob Wills is not schooled in the rudiments of music and some of the tunes his orchestra plays would defy the ingenuity of Sigmund Spaeth and yet he has a following which is beyond comprehension." Wills, he continued, "sprang from the ranches of Texas and has built his popularity by his hillbilly personality and 'that certain something' which is reflected in his recordings." While Wills's attorney had the utmost respect for the Irving Berlin publishing firm, he still believed that "an error was made when the song was changed both in melody and words." He kept reminding Bornstein of his own words of wisdom. "I believe that your original 'hunch,' if I may use such a term, was correct, namely that the original interpretation with 'that certain something' swing is the one which will sell

the song." Milsten added, "I trust that you will see the inconsistency of recordings being made constantly by Bob Wills of the original interpretation and the published interpretation being sold over the counter in music stores."

Milsten was not finished. A postscript—reflecting the same feeling and warmth that Wills put into his music—revealed how he went beyond the call of duty as a lawyer. "Since completing the body of this letter the thought has occurred to me that this entire situation might be likened to the late, beloved Will Rogers. If someone had taken Will and endeavored to school him in the art of public speaking, causing him to lose those treasured eccentricities of speech and mannerisms which he possessed, he would have been just another speaker without appeal, rather than a character whose memory is revered throughout the country." Applying this to Bob Wills and "San Antonio Rose," Milsten concluded, "I think this explains what you [Bornstein] had in mind when you talked about 'that certain something.' "[22]

The persistence of Bob Wills and the eloquent arguments of David Randolph Milsten finally brought the results they so desired. On November 22, 1940, Saul H. Bornstein wrote Milsten, "We have gone back to the original lyric and the original composition as given to us, per your request. . . . Columbia Record Co. has given it to Dick Jurgens and also Les Brown, and one or the other will record it. The Victor Company has submitted it to Larry Clinton who probably will record it and if not, they will give it to another recording orchestra."[23] Bob Wills and Milsten won the battle over which version of "San Antonio Rose" would be published; but both Wills and Irving Berlin won the war.

To save face and confusion, the Berlin firm published the composition, the way Bob Wills originally wrote it, as "New San Antonio Rose." This title not only distinguished it from the firm's revision, but the printed version now also had the same name, music, and lyrics as the popular recording Wills made in April, 1940. The company never again tried to tamper with the music of Bob Wills. Like Art Satherley of Columbia Records, they learned Wills knew what he was doing.[24]

Wills's recording of "New San Antonio Rose" was by no means the only successful recording of the song, nor was it the most successful. After the music was published in its original form, several artists recorded it. Bing Crosby's "New San Antonio Rose" was released the end of January, 1941, and sold more than 84,500 discs the last three days of that month![25] Eventually, it sold more than one and a half million copies. By 1950, Crosby had nineteen gold records to his credit, and this was one of them. More significantly, he had had only one other million-seller before "New San Antonio Rose": "Sweet Leilani" (1937).[26] Crosby interpreted "New San Antonio Rose" exactly as Wills had done in *his* recording. There was

not one sound on Crosby's 78 to suggest that he thought the song was country or "hillbilly." His arrangement was no different from any other popular song he was recording at the time. Crosby—like Wills—performed "New San Antonio Rose" for what it was, *pop music.*[27]

Crosby was always grateful to Wills for this song, but Wills was even more appreciative of Crosby. Bob Wills believed that Crosby's recording of "New San Antonio Rose" was the turning point in his own career: it played a large role in changing his image from that of a provincial southwesterner to that of a national music figure. Whether Wills overemphasized the importance of the Crosby recording and underemphasized his own is debatable. One thing is certain, both Wills and Crosby profited from "San Antonio Rose." The song was still so popular in 1942 that Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys recorded it with Crosby near the eighteenth green at Southern Hills Country Club in Tulsa and then offered to give a copy to the person buying the most war bonds. Leon McAuliffe reported that someone bought $250,000 in bonds to get that limited edition of "New San Antonio Rose."[28] More than thirty-five years have passed since Wills first recorded this selection, and bands, orchestras, and artists of various kinds still play and record it. In March, 1971, it was available on forty-five different records by thirty-eight different artists, from Arthur Fiedler and the Boston Pops to a rock arrangement by the Ventures.[29] Professor Joe Franz of the University of Texas remarked, "Bob Wills deserves to be remembered in American culture for writing 'San Antonio Rose.' Wherever I go, Germany or Switzerland or South America, and they sing American songs, 'San Antonio Rose' is one they always sing."[30]

World War II played a large role in introducing Wills's music to foreign audiences. Servicemen took his records with them, and many sang his songs on aircraft carriers and in foxholes around the world. A letter from two servicemen in Germany, however, indicates that Wills's music might have been known to the Germans before the Yanks got there. "While tossin' some Jerries out of a house we ran on to some old records and among them we were surprised to find one of your records—Rose of San Antonio," they wrote. "We would like to have you play a song for our wives. . . . How about 'Deep in the Heart of Texas'—because we are sure as hell deep in the heart of Germany."[31]

Nearly thirty years after "San Antonio Rose" was recorded, it was sung before the largest audience in its history. People around the world listened as astronauts Charles Conrad and Alan Bean serenaded them with a repertory of two songs from outer space and Apollo 12—one of them "San Antonio Rose."[32]

"New San Antonio Rose" made Wills a national musical figure. People began to ask questions about the man who was supposed to be an Oklahoma hillbilly and yet played music in the best swing tradition. *Metronome*

sent one of its writers from New York to Tulsa in late 1940 or early 1941 to write a story on Wills and his musicians. The writer was struck by the quality of Wills's musicians: "some of the finest jazzmen you've ever heard." The article, entitled "Okies Reverse Order of Steinbeck's Tale," reads as follows:

> Comes now a band that lives and works and plays in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and it refuses to leave that fair city! And we thought that NOBODY stayed in Oklahoma by choice! The band? Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys.
>
> Who are they? A twelve-piece crew built around the hillbilly ministrations of leader Wills who wrote the very healthy *San Antonio Rose.* Confidentially, this here Bob Wills band is the best-selling Columbia records band at the moment. . . .
>
> So what, just another success story. Not at all, not at all. This band pockets within its well-oiled (that's what they grow in Oklahoma—oil) ranks some of the finest jazzmen you've ever heard when you hear them. There's a trumpeter, for instance, who plays a great deal like Harry James, but doesn't copy Ziggy Elman. There's a clarinetist who's got the purity of style and the melodic emphasis of a great musician, and there's a guitarist who comes closer than any other white plectrist to getting the solidity and swing and steady flow of ideas of Charlie Christian. . . . Wait, that's not all. The rhythm section shields a drummer who gets a beat and keeps it, and therefore the rhythm, going. And it also keeps a pianist in the percussive, rhythmic style of a Stacy. In other words, the band's got something, in no uncertain terms.
>
> However, Wills is very suspicious of any approach to his band because he's afraid some big-city slicker from the east is going to steal away one of his precious bundles. And he's probably right. So the Texas Playboys go right on playing one-steps and the Oklahoma version of the shag at Cain's Dancing Academy in Tulsa . . . and they resist all offers to leave the sacred precinct of the Okie. Nonetheless, here's hoping they'll be enticed east. For one thing, that'll enable us to hear the band in person. For another, that'll give the boys a chance to hit the big-time they really deserve. And, for still another, that'll give some booker an attraction of real proportions: an all around group that doubles on strings, plays first-rate hot and carries a delightful hill-billy commercial tag.[33]

By 1940 many people, especially musicians, were discovering what *Metronome* was so enthusiastic about. Perhaps as much as "New San Antonio Rose," Bob's recording of "Big Beaver" helped bring even more jazzmen into his orchestra.[34] Danny Alguire, now with Walt Disney Studios and trumpeter in the Firehouse Five dixieland jazz band, recalled how he and other musicians got interested in Wills when they heard his "Big Beaver." "It was a hell of a record," he said. "I realized I was not aware of how far western music had come."[35] Alguire also became interested in Wills's orchestra because Benny Strickler was in it. Alguire could not believe Strickler would play in a western band since Strickler was "as-

sociated strictly with jazz music."[36] Strickler, the finest trumpeter he ever heard, had worked for Joe Venuti and other jazz bands and had turned down a job with Artie Shaw just before he joined Wills. "Why would this guy join a western band?" Alguire later learned why. When Strickler heard Bob's recording of "Big Beaver," he mused, "This is a western band? What is going on?" Regardless of what the music was called, it was jazz, and Benny wanted in the band that played it.[37] Strickler learned that Bob had his orchestra in Hollywood for a movie and recording session and was staying at the Hollywood Plaza Hotel. Benny caught Bob in the lobby and after a brief introduction got to the point: "I want a job in your band!" "O.K.!" Bob answered, without a moment's hesitation. "What do you play?" Quizzed about his hasty decision, Bob explained, "I could tell by looking at him he was a good musician." He was right.[38]

On a visit in Oklahoma City in November, 1941, Alguire read that Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys were playing at the Trianon Ballroom there the coming Tuesday night. He decided that was his chance to see his friend Benny Strickler and the "western band" that recorded "Big Beaver." The ballroom was on the second floor of the Trianon. "It took me fifteen minutes to get upstairs. I never saw such a crowd in my life. What in the world was going on? And even after I got upstairs it took me fifteen minutes to work my way to the bandstand." Danny was still puzzled about it thirty years later. "There must have been twenty-five hundred people there. . . . This guy must have a magic touch to draw this many people on a Tuesday night. But that was only a start. I would be more amazed than that at crowds."

The music impressed the young trumpeter even more than the crowd did. The band had "a beat that wouldn't quit. If you couldn't dance that beat, you can't walk. Your ears started to prick up as you heard that swingin' beat. Gee, what a beautiful bunch of musicians. They played so well together." Alguire observed that the band was "divided with horns and regular western set up. The sax section as a whole blended beautifully. God! It sounded like Glenn Miller or someone."

Danny got his horn out of his car and "set in" with the band that night. "How do you do?" Bob said at the close of the dance. "Do you want to work with my band?" Danny did, and he did not leave until World War II broke up the band late the next year. "Bob decided to go the full route and get a big band and play any kind of a job," Danny said. That same night, in fact, he hired two more jazzmen, Woodie Wood and Alex Brashear. "Woodie Wood was strictly a jazzman. His forte was he played beautiful clarinet. He could play as good as Benny Goodman and Artie Shaw."[39] Before joining Bob, Wood had been with Red Nichols for some time and had just completed several engagements in New Orleans. Alex Brashear had played trumpet in both the Charlie and the Jack Teagarden bands and was

playing in a dixieland group led by their sister, Norma Teagarden, just prior to joining Bob Wills.[40]

Bob hired many other fine jazzmen between 1940 and 1942. The *Metronome* article referred to a trumpeter in Bob's band "who plays a good deal like Harry James"[41]—Tubby Lewis. Some musicians think Tubby, who played those brilliant hot choruses in "Big Beaver," was years ahead of his time; Bob thought he was as fine a trumpet man as he ever heard.[42] Jamie McIntosh, another trumpeter, came to the band from the Ben Pollack Orchestra. Don Harlan, Tiny Mott, George Balay, Louis Tierney, Wayne Johnson, and Granville King made up the saxophone section between 1940 and 1942.[43] Neil Duer also played sax, but was at his best on tailgate trombone.[44] Joe Holley, who made his first recording with the band in 1942, was one of the hottest and most capable jazz fiddlers in the history of the Texas Playboys.[45] Morris Billington, Jr., played piano after Stricklin left the band in 1941. Millard Kelso, one of the best pianists Wills ever had,[46] came into the organization just as the band was breaking up during the war. Darrell Jones took over the bass when Son Lansford left the band.[47] Gene Tomlins played drums from 1941 until he went into the service.[48] Then Bob Fitzgerald became Wills's drummer.

Bob Fitzgerald has been compared favorably with Ray Baduc of Bob Crosby's Bobcats.[49] Woodie Wood: "[Fitzgerald] was the best drummer I ever worked with in my life. He was the softest-talking, meekest, mildest little guy and would get behind those drums and turn into a tiger." The Ray Baduc style was "pretty much the kind of drums [Fitzgerald] played." Wills's Playboys and Crosby's Bobcats were both basically two-beat bands. Crosby used the more modern four-beat swing for a while, and Wills used it occasionally. But both were really in the groove when they played the more "free-feeling, free-wheeling" two-beat style. Standard swing bands, if they had ever used it, gave it up in the thirties, and many of those musicians always looked on two-beat jazz as corny and old-fashioned.[50]

The comparison went beyond that of two great drummers. By 1941, Bob Wills had added so many fine jazzmen that his entire orchestra, when it was in California, was being compared with Crosby's Bobcats.[51] Danny Alguire and other members of Wills's band acknowledged that they played "a lot of Bob Crosby dixieland. 'Ten Years' had a decided dixieland sound. You know Bob liked it. Bob thought dixieland was just great. . . . Of course Bob Crosby was going real good then," Alguire added, "and we all liked him."[52] Besides this "decided Bob Crosby influence," the Wills and Crosby bands were compared because each played not only a dixieland rhythm and hot dance music, but sweeter music as well. Occasionally, Wills's orchestra played written arrangements, emphasizing saxophone ensembles, in a cooler, sweeter style closer to Glenn Miller, Tommy Dorsey, and other more standard swing orchestras. But generally at this time Wills was closer to the "Bobcat" style.[53]

By 1941, Bob Wills's music was much broader than just a combination of swing and dixieland. Woodie Wood had an appreciation of its breadth and versatility that perhaps no one else, not even Bob himself, had. According to Wood, the word to describe Wills's music, and a partial explanation of his success, was *styles*. Not *style*. Bob's orchestra comprised three bands, Woodie explained. "We had fiddles; we had the big ensemble band, and the 'Bobcat' band—dixieland."[54] "It was a band," Danny Alguire added, "that could go in any direction." It could give them dixieland jazz like Crosby's Bobcats; swing like Glenn Miller; or Bob Wills, his fiddle, and strings.[55]

Bob loved the inclusiveness of his band. Its wide repertory allowed him the self-expression he needed, and there was a practical and economic value as well. The band could play whatever the people wanted in dance music. In Pawhuska and other little towns at that time, the dancers wanted more strings than horns. They demanded fiddles and guitars, square dances and other old-time dances. Enough people there liked Glenn Miller and Bob Crosby that Wills always included some horn tunes, but he used the string band more, and "about the only times the horns were used was when they took a chorus." By contrast, at Cain's Academy in Tulsa, in Oklahoma City, in Dallas and Fort Worth, and on the West Coast, Bob used the big ensemble band and the "Bobcat" dixieland band much more, though he threw in enough fiddle tunes to be Bob Wills. Alguire described it:

> One of his greatest assets—he had a sixth sense of knowing what the people at that particular dance that night wanted to hear, and I never saw him call a wrong tune. He just seemed to know what to play and when to call it and when to call a horn tune or when to call a fiddle tune or when to call a vocal or when to call a guitar special. And listen, even today, years later, working in the Firehouse Five like I [am] now, I have taught the guys in the band the tricks of the Bob Wills era of how to call tunes for people. I learned; I used to watch Bob like a hawk and watch him call the right tune at the right time. And I figured out he had a system. He never called the same tempo or the same key twice in succession. In other words, the tempo would either be a faster or a slower tempo. It would either be slower or faster so that you had an undulating type of dance which made for interesting music, you see. He would play a slow tune, and then it would pick up, then go faster, then drop down and play a waltz. You know, it was ever changing, and that is one of the beautiful tricks I learned from Bob Wills.... And he used it very, very wisely.[56]

This accounts in part for Wills's popularity, for the fact that he could appear again and again at the same places. He played Cain's Academy in Tulsa more than ninety times every year for eight years, approximately 720 times, and his popularity was greater in 1942, at the end of these appearances, than it was in 1935, when he started.[57] There were other

places where he played between thirty and forty times a year and many places where he played several times a year for eight years. Such figures seem almost incredible in this age. Regardless of the popularity of an artist, few agents today would risk booking an artist into the same city more than two or three times a season.

While Bob Wills had a band for nearly thirty-five years, this big orchestra of the early forties was the one he would have kept forever had the war not broken it up.[58] He even wrote a new song to fit its big-band sound. "Let's come up with a nice big full-horn thing for a theme song," he told the boys. They tried various tunes and arrangements and finally came up with what Bob wanted, a theme that would feature the horn and string band. It was based on "what they call the B-flat blues pattern, twelve-bar blues," Alguire explained. Benny Strickler set a riff on the trumpet, and they "started kicking it around, playing it through, and it resulted in the theme 'Let's Ride with Bob.' . . . one good feature was the horns would take a section. Then Leon McAuliffe would fill in with the steel guitar. It was just slow blues and a key tune for Bob to holler on. We used it to start our dances." It was, Alguire concluded, "real jazz."[59]

1. Al Stricklin. Stricklin's own reminiscences may be found in his book, *My Years with Bob Wills,* written with Jon McConal (San Antonio: Naylor, forthcoming). Wills was popular beyond the Southwest before 1940. More important was his incredible appeal in that region. In early 1939, Gene Autry was asking Wills to play his songs over KVOO (Autry to Wills, Mar. 29, 1939; Wills to Autry, Apr. 7, 1939).

"San Antonio Rose" by Bob Wills (part of which is quoted as epigraph) is © copyright 1940 by Bourne, Inc., assigned 1961 Bourne Company, New York, N.Y. Copyright renewed. All rights reserved. International copyright secured. Used by permission.

2. Leon McAuliffe.

3. Al Stricklin; Johnnie Lee Wills; Jesse Ashlock; Bob Wills.

4. O. W. Mayo.

5. Ibid.

6. Bob Wills; O. W. Mayo. A San Antonio newspaper reported that Wills wrote "San Antonio Rose" in thirty minutes "because a record company agent wanted one more number at a recording session" (George Carmack, "A Famous Rose—and Bob Wills," *San Antonio Express-News,* Aug. 11, 1973). Unfortunately, this same tale was picked up in other newspapers and in a widely read music magazine. See Floyce Korsak, "Bob Wills—The Strains of His 'San Antonio Rose' Are Loosed into Whatever Infinity," *Dallas Times-Herald,* July 23, 1973; George Carmack, "Bob Wills Is Still Western Swing King," *Music City News,* 11, no. 4 (Oct., 1973), 32-B. I have interviewed nearly every man who played in the sessions at which "San Antonio Rose" (1938) and "New San Antonio Rose" (1940) were recorded, and every musician said it took Wills a good deal of time to work out the music in 1938 and the lyrics in 1940. Moreover, "San Antonio Rose" was not the *last* selection recorded in the November, 1938, session. It was the first and therefore could not have been written, as the story goes, because an agent wanted "one more number."

7. Eldon Shamblin; Leon McAuliffe; O. W. Mayo; Al Stricklin. Sleepy Johnson and Son Lansford thought Duncan wrote some of the lyrics. My own opinion is that Duncan's lyrics were rejected altogether and that Bob Wills got most of his help writing lyrics for "New San Antonio Rose" from Stover. Bob himself wrote the music and most of the lyrics. For another account, and a full transcription of the text, see Dorothy Horstman, *Sing Your Heart Out, Country Boy* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1975), pp. 170–171.

8. Valuable studies and discographies are included with new Time-Life Records series entitled *The Swing Era,* which covers the years from 1930 to the 1970s. See especially the sections "The Music in This Volume" and "Discography" in "How It Was To Be Young Then," brochure notes to *The Swing Era 1940–1941,* Time-Life Records STL 345, and "Swing as a Way of Life," *The Swing Era 1941–1942,* Time-Life Records STL 346.

9. Betty Wills. Very helpful on the 1940 Dallas session and other prewar sessions were the Questionnaire concerning Wayne Johnson and Bob Wills and Questionnaire concerning Jamie McIntosh and Bob Wills, both in the Glenn P. White Collection.

10. Bob Wills.

11. Ibid.; Al Stricklin; O. W. Mayo; Johnnie Lee Wills.

12. Leon McAuliffe.

13. "New San Antonio Rose," Okeh 05694, was recorded on April 16, 1940, and released on August 16, 1940. See Columbia Records' artist's cards for Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys, 1935–47.

14. Musicians on the West Coast praised the quality of Wills's "Big Beaver" and wondered what was going on in western music. Listen to Danny Alguire.

15. Jamie McIntosh; Wayne Johnson; Bob Wills; Ray DeGeer; Woodie Wood; Johnnie Lee Wills. Johnson, DeGeer, and Bob Wills thought the term *western swing* was used for Wills's music during the last years Wills had his band in Tulsa, between 1939 and 1942. Bob said that radio announcers and others in California may have coined the term when he had his band there making movies and playing dances between 1940 and 1942. Whether the term originated in Oklahoma or California, he was certain it was first used while he had his base of operation in Tulsa, to distinguish his music from that of the more standard swing bands. I have transcriptions of Wills's radio programs that show that the term was being used in 1945 as if it was quite well known and understood by his listeners. My own research leads me to conclude that the term originated as early as 1942. See also Peter Tamony to me, Sept. 17, Oct. 5, 1974.

16. "Songs from Texas," *Time,* Mar. 24, 1941, p. 36. See also Rupert Noval Richardson, *Texas: The Lone Star State* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1943), p. 549; Bill C. Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.: A Fifty-Year History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), pp. 180–181, 197, 249. Malone states that "Young Love" was the first recording by a country artist to be in the number one position on the popular music charts; country favorites "New San Antonio Rose" and "Pistol Packin' Mama" occupied a similar position at least two decades before "Young Love" was recorded, but these recordings were by pop artists. See also Maurice Zolotow, "Hillbilly Boom," *Saturday Evening Post,* Feb. 12, 1944, pp. 22, 36–38.

17. A list of gold record awards was researched and prepared in August, 1967, by Columbia Records (CBS Records Division), New York. I am grateful to Martine McCarthy for making this list available.

18. David Randolph Milsten to Irving Berlin, Inc., July 16, 1940; Saul H. Bornstein to Milsten, Aug. 9, 1940. Listen also to Bob Wills; O. W. Mayo; David Randolph Milsten.

19. Bornstein to Milsten, Aug. 9, 1940. David Randolph Milsten.

20. I am indebted to Ada Perry for a copy of this sheet music (New York: Irving Berlin, 1940). Copies are so rare that when Bourne Company was asked for permission to reprint the lyrics in this study, that firm did not seem to have the published sheet music in its own files.

21. Bornstein to Milsten, Aug. 9, 1940.

22. Milsten to Bornstein, Aug. 13, 1940; David Randolph Milsten; Bob Wills; O. W. Mayo.

23. Bornstein to Milsten, Nov. 22, 1940.

24. Two songbooks were later published by the firm: *Bob Wills Song Book: The Roundup of the Century* (New York: Irving Berlin Publishing Co., 1942) and, after the company changed hands, *Bob Wills Song Book of the Century No. 2* (New York: Bourne Music Co., 1945).

25. "Songs from Texas," p. 36. Crosby recorded "New San Antonio Rose" on December 16, 1940, and it was released on January 28, 1941. See the discography in Janis Untermeyer's brochure notes to *Bing: A Musical Autobiography,* Decca DX-151, pp. 15, 18.

26. Untermeyer, "Bing," p. 18. Also Bob Wills.

27. Crosby's "New San Antonio Rose" was first released as a single, Decca 23968. Decca later issued the recording on two albums, on an "extended-play album" (78 rpm), *Don't Fence Me In,* Decca A-559, and an LP, *Don't Fence Me In,* Decca DL 5063. Contrast Crosby's arrangement of "New San Antonio Rose" with his hillbilly interpretation of "Pistol Packin' Mama," Decca 23484.

28. Leon McAuliffe; Harry Rasmussin. Rasmussin, the sound engineer in charge of the KVOO mobile unit that day at the country club, remembered the disc sold for $20,000 in bonds. According to a fan's notebook, Crosby, Wills, and the Texas Playboys also did "Johnny Doughboy," "Jingle, Jangle, Jingle," "Sweet Lorraine," "Mexicali Rose," and "Melancholy Baby." It may be that all of them brought $250,000 in bonds. Glenn White to me, Sept. 27, 1972; White to Gus Branberg, Aug. 1, 1963. See also "Singing a Hit," *Tulsa Daily World,* Sept. 19, 1942.

29. *Phonolog Reports,* Mar. 1, 1971, pp. 118-9A–9B. According to information in the archives of the Bourne Music Company (formerly Irving Berlin Publishing Company), more than 350 different recordings of "San Antonio Rose" have been made since 1941.

30. Joe Franz. By November, 1941, "New San Antonio Rose" was popular even in Puerto Rico. Byron Chew wrote Wills that his recording was played often on the *villionera* [nickelodeon] in Vieques, Puerto Rico (Nov. 7, 1941). See Sean Toolan, "Whole World Fell in Love with Bob Wills' 'New San Antonio Rose'—Bedridden King of Western Songs Finds Comfort in His Loving Wife, Friends, Music," *National Tattler,* Dec. 23, 1973, p. 32.

31. James Fletcher and Harvey D. Dye to Bob Wills, Apr. 27, 1945. These soldiers were so surprised at finding the copy of "San Antonio Rose" they wrote, "Originally we were going to send this to Ripley ['Believe It or Not'] but decided that you should be the first one to hear about it. . . ."

32. "Country Music from Outer Space," *CMA Close-Up,* 11, no. 9 (Dec., 1969), 1; Toolan, "Whole World Fell in Love."

33. "Okies Reverse Order of Steinbeck's Tale," *Metronome,* 57, no. 4 (Apr., 1941), 24. Used by permission of Robert Asen.

34. "Big Beaver," Okeh 05905, was recorded on April 16, 1940, and released on December 6, 1940. See Columbia Records' artist's cards for Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys, 1935–47; Martine McCarthy to me, Apr. 26, 1973.

35. Danny Alguire. Alguire played for Wills from 1941 until late 1942. He was hired as a trumpeter, but did the vocals on one of Bob's greatest hits, "Home in San Antone," Okeh 6710, recorded in 1942. Alguire plays trumpet now with the Firehouse Five plus Two; he may be heard on *Firehouse Five plus Two Crashes a Party,* Goodtime Jazz S-10038, and *Firehouse Five Story, Vol. 3,* Goodtime Jazz L-12012.

36. Benny Strickler joined the band in late 1940 or early 1941 and made his first recordings with Bob in July, 1941. He left Wills when the band broke up in 1942. He later organized Benny Strickler and the Yerba Buena Jazz Band and, for Goodtime Jazz Records, recorded classics like "Jazzin' Baby Blues," "Dipper Mouth Blues," "Fidgety Feet," and "Kansas City Stomp." Strickler was very popular with jazz enthusiasts at San Francisco's Dawn Club and members of the Hot Music Society of San Francisco, who sought Wills's recordings in which Strickler played. His name was associated with jazz, Bob Wills, and western swing. See Peter Tamony to me, Sept. 17, Oct. 5, 1974.

37. Danny Alguire; Neil Duer.

38. Bob Wills; Betty Wills; Danny Alguire. See Francis Strickler to Bob Wills, Dec. 7, 1942, and Bonnie Strickler to Bob Wills, Dec. 8, 1942, thanking Bob for money he had lent them so Benny could get proper medical attention. Benny evidently had a respiratory ailment, perhaps tuberculosis, and spent some time in a sanatorium in Arkansas.

39. Danny Alguire; Neil Duer.

40. Woodie Wood; Alex Brashear.

41. "Okies Reverse Order," p. 24.

42. Bob Wills.

43. Jamie McIntosh; George Balay; Wayne Johnson. Don Harlan, Tiny Mott, and Louis Tierney are now deceased.

44. See Neil Duer to Glenn P. White, Aug. 9, 1961, and especially my interview with Neil Duer.

45. Joe Holley was with the Johnnie Lee Wills group for some time before he joined Bob Wills. For laudatory comments on Holley's jazz violin work from an artist who worked with Tommy Dorsey and other bands in the Big Band Era and with Holley in a Bob Wills movie, refer to my Ken Curtis interview. Curtis's fame as Festus on the "Gunsmoke" television series has overshadowed the fact that he is a capable crooner and took Frank Sinatra's job when the latter left Tommy Dorsey's orchestra. Curtis later starred as a singing cowboy in western movies for Columbia and other studios. He made one movie with Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys. Also Joe Holley.

46. Jesse Ashlock (Ken Griffis interview). Kelso became Wills's pianist again after the war and played for him longer than any other pianist. Kelso is now deceased.

47. Darrell Jones.

48. Smokey Dacus said he left the band in 1940 when Bob began making movies because he could see how silly he would look trying to ride a horse and carry his drums across the saddle. He also wanted to get into some profession that afforded a better future and easier life.

49. George Balay; Wayne Johnson; Woodie Wood; Danny Alguire; Neil Duer.

50. Woodie Wood; Neil Duer; George Balay. See George T. Simon, *The Big Bands* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1967), pp. 131–139.

51. Nearly all the members of the band who made trips to California between 1940 and 1942 remarked that newspapers and other musicians often pointed to the similarities between Bob Wills's and Bob Crosby's music. The similarities were not accidental, because Wills's musicians all expressed a great admiration for Bob Crosby and his Bobcats.

52. Danny Alguire. Neil Duer said there was a decided "Bobcat style" to Wills's band in 1942. Duer credited Benny Strickler with being the "fuse" of the brass section. It was Strickler, above all, who helped create the "Bobcat" or dixieland sound.

53. Contemporary recordings of Wills's dances, such as my tapes of 1940 KVOO radio broadcasts by Wills's "big orchestra" from Cain's Dancing Academy, make this distinction more apparent than do his phonograph records.

54. Woodie Wood.

55. George Balay; Al Stricklin; Leon McAuliffe; Eldon Shamblin; Jamie McIntosh; Johnnie Lee Wills; Bob Wills; Darrell Jones; Billy Jack Wills; Danny Alguire; Neil Duer.

56. Danny Alguire.

57. O. W. Mayo.

58. Bob Wills.

59. Danny Alguire. Neil Duer, who played trombone in this band, praised Strickler for his ability to set riffs and inspire the whole band with his ability as a first-rate jazzman.

15

The Silver Screen and Music on the West Coast

Take Me Back to Oklahoma, co-starring Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys with Tex Ritter

Rialto Theatre advertisement

Mr. Wills, did you happen to bring your fiddle? . . . Would you please play it? That's what we really wanted most of all to hear.

A student at the University of Oklahoma

After the success of "New San Antonio Rose," colleges and universities began to ask Wills for bookings. The first, appropriately, was the University of Oklahoma. Mayo received a letter from a fraternity there that had rented the university gymnasium for its annual dance. At first Bob all but turned the request down. After a day or so Mayo approached him again. "Bob, what do you want to do about going down to O.U.?"[1] Bob had always felt insecure about his lack of formal education and felt that college people, particularly, made fun of his music, especially his uninhibited style.[2] This impression led him to make some serious mistakes and to miss some deserved opportunities later in his career. It almost caused him to miss this one at the University of Oklahoma. "They won't like us at the college," he answered. "We don't play their kind of music." Mayo said, "OK, Bob, but if they had not wanted us, they wouldn't have asked us." Bob told him to go ahead and book the job if he thought it was wise.[3]

Mayo did book the job, and Bob took his big horn band of about seventeen musicians to Norman for the fraternity dance. A crowd of two or three thousand came.[4] Bob did not even take his fiddle out of the case, but put it behind the piano. The horn band started the dance with "In the Mood." Al Stricklin said, "It was beautiful music, as pretty as Tommy Dorsey or anyone could play." But nobody danced. The people just stood around and looked, as if it were a concert. The band played another swing piece. Still no dancers. Bob said, "Hell, I knew they wouldn't like our music."[5] Something had gone wrong with Wills's sixth sense. Was this the

From Bob Wills's first movie, *Take Me Back to Oklahoma* (Monogram Pictures, 1940). *Left to right:* Bob Wills, Tex Ritter, Leon McAuliffe, Johnnie Lee Wills, unidentified man, Wayne Johnson, Son Lansford, Eldon Shamblin. *(Courtesy Johnnie Lee Wills)*

Bob Wills plays as Ann Miller dances on the set of the Columbia movie *Go West Young Lady,* 1941. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

Penny Singleton serenades Bob Wills and his orchestra during the filming of Columbia Pictures' *Go West Young Lady,* 1941. *Left to right:* Louis Tierney (saxophone), Leon McAuliffe (steel guitar), Harold P. "Cap" Kelly (partially hidden; trumpet), Al Stricklin (piano), Eldon Shamblin (guitar), Bob Wills, unidentified musician, Penny Singleton, Gene Tomlins, Wayne Johnson (saxophone), Claude McCray (trombone), Don Harlan (saxophone), Jamie McIntosh (trumpet), Tommy Duncan, Zeb McNally (saxophone), Darrell Jones (bass). *(Courtesy Al Stricklin)*

Penny Singleton plays drums for Bob Wills (left) and drummer Gene Tomlins (right) during the filming of Columbia Pictures' *Go West Young Lady,* 1941. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

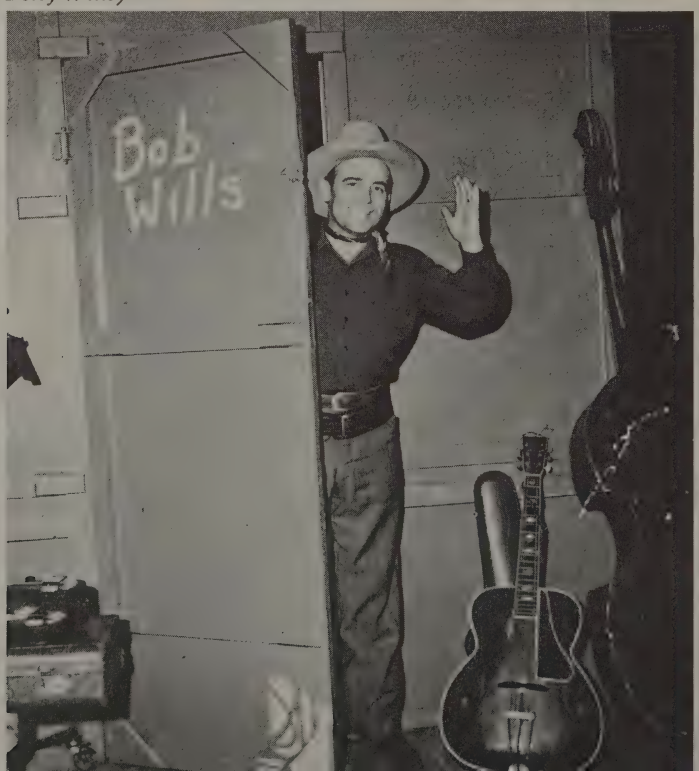
Bing Crosby and Bob Wills in Hollywood, early 1940s. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

Signing the contract to make eight movies for Columbia Pictures in 1942. *Left to right:* David Randolph Milsten, Bob Wills, O. W. Mayo. *(Courtesy David Randolph Milsten)*

Mary Lou (Cloud) and Rosetta Wills. *(Courtesy Rosetta Wills Arnett)*

Poster, early 1940s. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

Bob Wills at the door of his makeshift dressing room on location during the filming of a Columbia picture, 1942. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*



man of whom Alguire said, "I never saw him call a wrong tune"? Bob Wills had called two wrong and was on his way to failure that night in Norman, when a college boy rescued him. The young man walked up to the platform where the band was playing. Al Stricklin: "I always thought it was the president of the fraternity. He said 'Mr. Wills, did you happen to bring your fiddle?' Bob said, 'Why, ah, yes! But I thought you wouldn't want that kind of music.' The young man said, 'Would you please play it? That's what we really wanted most of all to hear.' " Stricklin continued, "Bob got his fiddle and said, 'One, two, three, four' and began to play 'Ida Red.' Everybody in the place got up and began dancing. You never saw anything like it. Bob began to holler, and from then on, they would dance to anything we played."[6]

Though this response pleased Bob, it also puzzled him. He had spent many years and much money to develop a first-rate swing band, and yet those college students, of all people, wanted to hear the fiddle tunes he had been playing for thirty years. He always had a deep respect for the plain people, his public. And though he could not see it at the time, it may have been that his people kept him from making a costly mistake, that is, moving too far from the music he had started with. The public made him keep his balance musically. Wills began to learn that night that *he* was what they really wanted. Regardless of how good his band was, without Wills it was just another good swing band. And there were many of them across America in the early forties. One key to Wills's success was that his band could double on strings to change the music and pace and, above all, give them Bob Wills and his fiddle.[7]

All of this became more obvious in the summer of 1940, when Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys made their first motion picture. Wills began negotiating for a movie contract even before his hit recording of "New San Antonio Rose." He had told the people of Tulsa earlier that he was not interested in making movies,[8] but by late 1939 he had apparently changed his mind and was very anxious to get into films. In January, 1940, the Bruce Gear Agency of Hollywood wrote regarding a movie contract they had been trying to get for him.[9] Though the agency had taken Wills's publicity material and records to several studios, they were unable to report anything more than that "they were interested." Leonard Goldstein had offered Wills a contract to make a series of very cheap westerns, with only $20,000 invested in each. The Gear agency advised Wills not to accept the offer, as the movies would be, to use their own word, "stinkeroos."

Wills decided against the stinkeroos and instead signed a contract with Monogram Pictures to make a movie with Tex Ritter appropriately entitled *Take Me Back to Oklahoma.* The contract, much to Wills's chagrin, called for Wills and a small string band.[10] Monogram had realized what the fraternity president also knew, that the people wanted Bob Wills and his

fiddle, and there was no need to hire a big swing orchestra. Wills would have loved to take his big orchestra, but the script called for him and only five other musicians. Wills played fiddle in the movie; Leon McAuliffe, steel guitar; Johnnie Lee Wills, guitar; Eldon Shamblin, guitar; Son Lansford, bass. The only horn man was Wayne Johnson on clarinet.[11]

When the movie was released, many of Wills's fans, who for years had heard him on radio and records, saw him for the first time. They were thrilled. Wills and his Texas Playboys appeared in their first scene dressed like ranch cowboys, riding atop a stagecoach, playing and singing. The movie was a typical Saturday western or shoot-'em-up. Wills had some lines in it, and it was obvious before he spoke half a dozen of them that he would never win any Academy Awards. Nevertheless, he was in show business, and this got him before more people than ever before. Regardless of his limitations as an actor, he had been to Hollywood and had been on the silver screen, and many people would consider him a movie star. All this helped business at Cain's and at other dances. When the movie premiered in Tulsa, Lieutenant Governor James Berry, Bob Wills, and Tex Ritter led a large parade through the streets in honor of the "movie men."[12] In its advertisements the Rialto Theatre made it appear that Wills was the star. One read, " 'Take Me Back to Oklahoma' co-starring Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys with Tex Ritter."[13] Ritter was, of course, a veteran actor and the actual star—but not in Tulsa.[14]

On February 24, 1941, Bob Wills took his "movie men" to Dallas for a recording session. There were thirteen members of the band, and the personnel was about the same as in the session the year before. In terms of swing music in the style of the big orchestras of the 1930s and 1940s, this session was probably the best and most pleasing to Wills.[15] At least five big swing-band records were cut: "Lyla Lou," "New Worried Mind," "La Paloma," "I Found a Dream," and "Maiden's Prayer." These last three, especially, demonstrate that if his goal was to create beautiful music, he achieved it. If it was to show those swing musicians who had made light of his music that he could equal or beat their own sound, he achieved that also. He probably wanted to do both. The recording of "Maiden's Prayer" reveals a great deal about Bob Wills's music in the Tulsa years. He had first recorded "Maiden's Prayer" in Dallas in 1935 as the frontier fiddle tune it was. In this session, six years later, he introduced it with an ensemble of saxophones; Tommy Duncan performed the new lyrics; except for Eldon Shamblin's guitar break introducing Duncan's vocals, not a single fiddle or stringed instrument was featured. In the same session, however, Wills did record a frontier fiddle tune, "Done and Gone," and a selection that featured fiddles and the string band, "Take Me Back to Tulsa," which was to become an all-time western swing favorite.[16] In "Mississippi Delta Blues," Tommy Duncan and the band gave one of their best perfor-

mances. This session was replete with the versatility that Wills loved and wanted in a band, the band he wished he could have kept forever.[17]

Wills would have only two more recording sessions with his original Tulsa band, however. The first occurred in July, 1941, while they were in Hollywood to make a movie for Columbia Pictures. This was the only movie in which Wills ever got to use his big band, his horn band as well as his string band. The film, entitled *Go West Young Lady,* starred Glenn Ford, Penny Singleton, Ann Miller, and Charles Ruggles.[18] Many of the scenes took place in a saloon, and Wills and the band played the role of saloon orchestra. He used more than twenty musicians for these scenes, including some of the finest he ever employed. Claude McCray, who had been playing with the Ben Pollack band in California before he joined Wills for the movie, said Wills added some violins, oboes, flutes, and French horns to his orchestra and recorded "all the musical score" for the movie. Sammy Cahn provided the orchestration, and Morris Stoloff, musical director for Columbia Pictures, directed the orchestra—indicating the caliber of musician Wills had in his organization on the eve of the war.[19]

During the filming of *Go West Young Lady,* Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys had a recording session for Columbia, their first in Hollywood, on July 24, 1941. Wills had at least twelve men in the band for the session and was proud of the quality and breadth of their repertory. He could not wait to surprise Art Satherley with his big-band sound. When Uncle Art came into the studio, Wills had his band ready to play their best swing. Eldon Shamblin said, "All Bob had to do was drop his fiddle bow and that band would blow him out of the bandstand." However, Wills did not have his bow to drop; he had left his fiddle in its case. "Mr. Satherley," he said, "I want you to hear something." Al Stricklin recalled, "Bob smiled and kicked off his band, and they played as beautiful a swing music as you ever heard a horn band play, all reading musicians." Smiling broadly, Bob asked, "What do you think about that, Mr. Satherley?" Satherley responded, "Oh, Bob! That was beautiful; it is the most beautiful thing I've ever heard. It sounds just like Tommy Dorsey. But by God! If we had wanted Tommy Dorsey we would have hired him. We hired Bob Wills. So get your fiddle, Bob." Stricklin said, "Bob never looked so sad and disappointed in his life."[20] Satherley must have had his way in that session, because the recordings were dominated more by the stringed instruments than by the horn band. Though there were no recordings of the old fiddle tunes, Wills "got his fiddle," as Satherley suggested, and played it in most of the numbers. Some of the records that came out of the session sold very well: "Lil Liza Jane," an old jazz-band favorite; "Please Don't Leave Me" and "My Life's Been a Pleasure," two Wills favorites; "Cherokee Maiden," "Ride On! (My Prairie Pinto)," and "Dusty Skies," which were all western- and cowboy-oriented.[21]

Late in the summer of 1941, the Texas Playboys finished their work in

the West, and their big bus, the "Playboy Limited," took them back to Tulsa. Prosperous (some of the boys were earning two hundred dollars a week plus travel and lodging), successful, and happy, as they all were, they little knew they were nearing the end of an era. They were soon back at Cain's, at the noon broadcasts, and on the road playing dances in a five-state area of the Southwest. Above all, they were back in Tulsa, where they had enjoyed the give-and-take with each other and with their fans during the glory years since 1934. Those years had been like one long summer of being boys again, well paid for playing and never really working. But on December 7, an event far from Tulsa ended it all. The day after Pearl Harbor, just before the noon broadcast, Tommy Duncan said to his fellow band members, "I don't know about the rest of you guys, but I'm going to join 'this man's army' and fight those son-of-a-bitches."[22] In a few days Duncan enlisted and was soon gone. He had been with Bob Wills longer than any other man, since the Doughboy days of 1932. Al Stricklin left to work in a defense plant in Fort Worth. What might be called the original Tulsa (prewar) Texas Playboys band began to break up before Christmas, 1941, and by Christmas the next year it was history.[23]

Bob Wills managed to keep a band together through all of 1942. However, Leon McAuliffe and Eldon Shamblin were the only members of the prewar group who were still with him. By early 1942, Wills had gone almost entirely to a horn band. His own and one other violin, McAuliffe's steel guitar, and Shamblin's guitar were the only strings in a fifteen-member band. When he signed a contract to co-star in eight pictures for Columbia that year with Russell Hayden, and the contract called for only stringed instruments, he had to borrow some of these musicians from Johnnie Lee Wills's band. He took McAuliffe to play steel guitar; Harley Huggins, guitar and vocals; Millard Kelso, guitar; Joe Holley, fiddle; and Luke Wills, bass. Bob left his big band in Tulsa under Johnnie Lee's direction.[24] Filming of the "eight-day wonders," as McAuliffe called them, began in June, 1942. Cindy Walker, a Texas songwriter, was employed by Columbia to write the songs for all eight movies, and her lyrics often depicted the western and cowboy environment in which they were set.[25] The films were titled *A Tornado in the Saddle, The Lone Prairie, Riders of the Northwest Mounted, Silver City Raiders, Saddles and Sagebrush, The Vigilante's Ride, Wyoming Hurricane,* and *The Last Horseman.*[26] Together, these western movies and Cindy Walker's music did a great deal toward building the western or cowboy image that stayed with Wills throughout his career. Despite the fact that he loved his fifteen-piece horn and swing band better than any other he ever had, and despite the fact that the recording that brought him fame, "New San Antonio Rose," was made with a big horn band, he would always be associated with a different kind of music.

The band worked each Friday in the Columbia Pictures studio learning the songs Cindy Walker had written for a particular movie. On Saturday they worked in the Columbia sound studio recording the sound track. Monday through Thursday came the actual filming. It generally took about a week to complete one of these "wonders."[27]

By the end of June, two of the eight movies had been completed, and the schedule called for filming two more in August, two in October, and two in November. Wills sent some of Johnnie Lee's men back to Tulsa and had his big band report to Hollywood for a recording session on July 14, 15, and 16. Altogether there Bob used seventeen musicians: himself and Joe Holley, violins; Louis Tierney, violin and saxophone; Leon Huff, guitar and vocals; Bob Lee, vocals; Leon McAuliffe, steel guitar; Doyle Salathiel, electric guitar; Darrell Jones, bass; Morris Billington, Jr., piano; Woodie Wood, clarinet and saxophone; Neil Duer, trombone and saxophone; George Balay, saxophone and clarinet; Don Harlan, saxophone and clarinet; Alex Brashear, Benny Strickler, and Danny Alguire, trumpets; and Bob Fitzgerald, drums.[28] They cut some of Cindy Walker's movie compositions, such as "Miss Molly." Wills recorded an old-time fiddle tune, "Liberty." One hit from the session was "Home in San Antone"; another was "You're from Texas." The session was weighted heavily toward big-band dance music. Some of the recordings were sweet swing, like "My Laddie" and "This Little Rosary." Most were the hot swing that Wills loved and played so much. Some of these blended his more western style with the big swing-band sound: "Drop Us Off at Bob's Place," "My Confession," and "Let's Ride with Bob." The more standard swing selections were "Whose Heart Are You Breaking Now," "When It's Honey Suckle Time in the Valley," and "Ten Years," which became a Wills favorite. "Ten Years" was probably Leon Huff's best vocal performance, and the big horn band's dixieland would have pleased a jazz enthusiast on Bourbon Street. This was the last session Wills had with his big prewar bands, the ones he and his musicians declared were his best.

While Wills had his big band in California for these recording sessions, he decided to play some dance engagements before returning to Tulsa. He had played dances with his big band the year before, during the filming of *Go West Young Lady.* People came by the thousands, and many were turned away. Wills assumed his audiences were made up of people who had moved to California from the Southwest,[29] but judging from the size of his audiences, he overestimated the importance of the erstwhile Southwesterners. Through recordings and movies, his fame had spread far beyond the Southwest, and the war was breaking down provincialism in musical tastes. Moreover, Wills's big-band sound was no different from that heard in New York hotels in 1942. His own songs were gaining national audiences. Ray

DeGeer, for example, said that when he was playing with Charlie Barnet in Massachusetts during the early months of the war, "San Antonio Rose" was one of the songs most requested.[30]

Bob Wills took his big orchestra back to Tulsa in July, 1942, and remained there with it nearly a month before returning to Hollywood. Besides his home, his mother and father, and various business interests, there were two things that made Wills want to spend some time in Tulsa between movies. First, but not most important, was his local draft board, which had informed him he would be drafted into the army late that fall.[31] Bob told the board he had several movies to make that would be finished in December and that as soon as they were completed he would enlist, if the board would defer him until them. The board agreed, assuming the publicity about Wills's enlistment would encourage others to do the same.[32]

In early October, Wills went back to Hollywood to begin filming the last four of the eight movies he made that year. These shoot-'em-ups again called for just Wills and five other string musicians. He took Leon McAuliffe on steel guitar; Jesse Ashlock, fiddle; Luke Wills, bass; Cotton Thompson and Junior Barnard, guitars. Since the filming schedule was the same as for the four films they had made that spring and summer, they had their weekends free to play dances in the Los Angeles area. Wills was reluctant at first, since he only had six musicians including himself. He decided to accept some bookings and told McAuliffe, "We will play a few dances with the small band and see how they go." Foreman Phillips helped by publicizing their dances over his popular Southern California radio show. The first weekend they played the Venice Pier, and in three nights played to fifteen thousand customers.[33] Wills was surprised at how successful his dances were even with such a small band. He began to understand that people would come to see him regardless of the kind of lineup he had with him. McAuliffe thought this was why Wills went to a smaller band after the war, though according to Wills, it was not the reason.[34] Wills did see that he could draw big audiences with fewer musicians, but a small group like the one he used in California did not satisfy him musically. He was concerned with more than just making money. He always loved his big orchestra with its combination of strings and horns, and he took great pride in it. It may be history in the subjunctive, but one has to wonder just how big and what kind of orchestra he would have developed had it not been for the war.

1. O. W. Mayo; Al Stricklin. See also "Bob Wills Playing for S N Sadie Hawkins Hop Tonight," *Arkansas Traveler* (University of Arkansas), Nov. 15, 1940.
2. Ray DeGeer.
3. O. W. Mayo; Al Stricklin.
4. Ibid.
5. Al Stricklin.

6. Ibid.; Smokey Dacus; O. W. Mayo.

7. Ray DeGeer; Eldon Shamblin; Leon McAuliffe; Danny Alguire. McAuliffe stressed this point more than any other member, though others recognized its importance.

8. See *1939 Annual Tulsa Rodeo Program* in Herman Arnspiger Scrapbook. See also "Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys Celebrating 4 Years of Broadcasting over KVOO," *Tulsa Tribune,* Feb. 6, 1938.

9. Bruce Gear Agency to Bob Wills, Jan. 29, 30, 1940. At least by the summer of 1939, Wills's lawyer felt Wills was getting too big for Tulsa; see David R. Milsten to Rudy Vallee, July 11, 1939.

10. Tex Ritter told me Wills could have made some movies earlier, but refused because the studios insisted he bring only a small string band. When Ritter phoned Wills, Bob said, "Tex, for you I will split my band" (Ritter, field notes).

11. Leon McAuliffe; Son Lansford; Johnnie Lee Wills; Bob Wills. See also Son Lansford; Questionnaire concerning Wayne Johnson and Bob Wills, Glenn P. White Collection; Phillip Banister Scrapbook; Rosetta Wills Arnett Scrapbook. For further information about the songs and personnel in this and other Wills movies, see Bob Pinson's Filmusicography.

12. Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook; Al Stricklin Scrapbook; Ada Perry Scrapbook; Joe Ferguson Scrapbook; field notes and tape with Tex Ritter; Keith Kolby, "They Went Thataway!!!," *Country Music Reporter,* 4, no. 9 (Dec., 1973), 8–10.

13. According to a KVOO news release, *Take Me Back to Oklahoma* broke all attendance records at the Rialto, where attendance was up 50 percent. See especially Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook.

14. See "In Person at the Rialto" and the Rialto advertisement for *Take Me Back to Oklahoma* in the *Tulsa Daily World,* Nov. 17, 1940.

15. See Questionnaire concerning Wayne Johnson and Bob Wills and Questionnaire concerning Jamie McIntosh and Bob Wills, Glenn P. White Collection.

16. "Take Me Back to Tulsa" had been introduced in the movie *Take Me Back to Oklahoma.*

17. Bob Wills.

18. See Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook, Al Stricklin Scrapbook, and Ada Perry Scrapbook for material regarding this movie. See also Maxine Arnold, "Pictures Puzzling Wills' Playboys—Bob and Gang Like Screen City But It Has Problems," *Tulsa Daily World,* July 27, 1941; "Bob Wills Film with Cast of Notables to Open Here," ibid., Oct. 29, 1941; Phillip Banister Scrapbook; Rosetta Wills Arnett Scrapbook.

19. Claude "Whoopy" McCray; Leon McAuliffe; Johnnie Lee Wills; Al Stricklin; O. W. Mayo.

20. Eldon Shamblin; Al Stricklin; Leon McAuliffe; Arthur E. Satherley.

21. Satherley told me he never cared for the horns in Wills's band and always tried to keep Wills close to the folk roots of his music.

22. Al Stricklin; Leon McAuliffe; O. W. Mayo.

23. Most writers refer, incorrectly, to anyone who was in the band before 1942 (or in any Tulsa band) as an "original Texas Playboy." The only "original Playboys" were Bob Wills, Tommy Duncan, Johnnie Lee Wills, and June and Kermit Whalin.

24. Leon McAuliffe; Johnnie Lee Wills. For a brief review of these movies, see Maxine Arnold, " 'Playboys' Hit in Movie City," *Tulsa Daily World,* Dec. 6, 1942. See also "Movie Contract for Bob Wills," *Tulsa Tribune,* Apr. 3, 1942; "Columbia Has Xavier Cugat Slated for the Next Astaire-Hayworth Vehicle and the Same Studio Bob Wills and His 'Texas Playboys' Signed for a Series of Eight Horse Operas," *Downbeat,* May 15, 1942, p. 16; Rosetta Wills Arnett Scrapbook; Phillip Banister Scrapbook; Joe Holley; Joe Holley Scrapbook; Harley Huggins.

25. For a survey of Cindy Walker's career, see "Cindy Walker—Drivin' Woman," *Tulsa Daily World,* Jan. 21, 1945. See also Floyce Korsak, "With a Song in Her Heart," *Dallas Times Herald,* Oct. 3, 1973, and Miss Walker's comments on *A Tribute to Bob,* United Artists SP-105.

26. George E. Marshall, Jr., Columbia Pictures, to me, Mar. 7, 1975. See Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook for material on these and other movies.

27. Leon McAuliffe. Bob Wills called the films "seven-day wonders."

28. Darrell Jones; Leon McAuliffe; Woodie Wood; George Balay; Wayne Johnson; Neil Duer to Glenn P. White, Aug. 9, 1961; Neil Duer; Eldon Shamblin; Bob Wills; Bob Lee; Alex Brashear; Joe Holley; Danny Alguire.

29. Bob Wills; Betty Wills; Neil Duer; Leon McAuliffe; Eldon Shamblin; Al Stricklin; Johnnie Lee Wills; Claude "Whoopy" McCray; Danny Alguire; Darrell Jones.

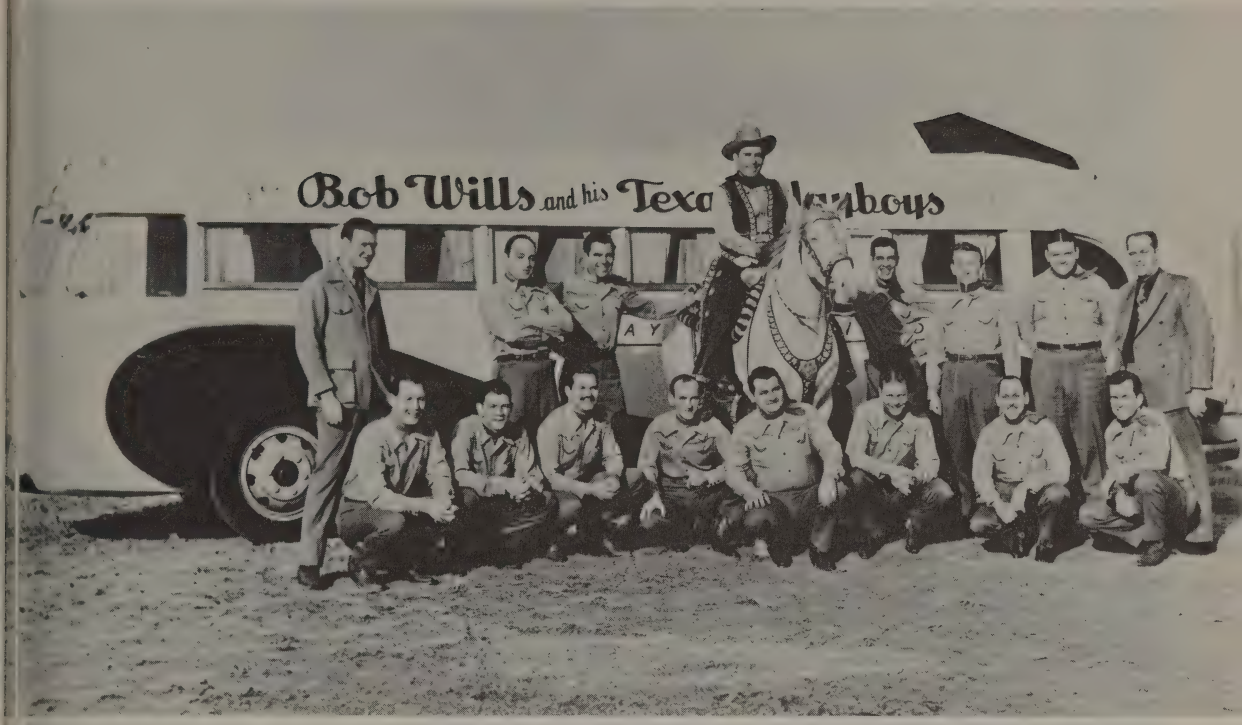
30. Ray DeGeer.

31. Columbia Pictures stated in a news release that they would speed up the last four pictures "to free the Players for service." Russell Hayden also went into the service as soon as these were completed. See Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook; Ada Perry; Betty Wills.

32. Bob Wills; Leon McAuliffe; Eldon Shamblin; O. W. Mayo.

33. Leon McAuliffe said the crowd size was incredible. The police made them quit selling tickets at 11:00 P.M. because they feared the dance floor would collapse. At that time the line outside trying to get in was "ten deep and lined up all the way into the town of Venice." Listen also to Jesse Ashlock (Ken Griffis interview).

34. Bob Wills.

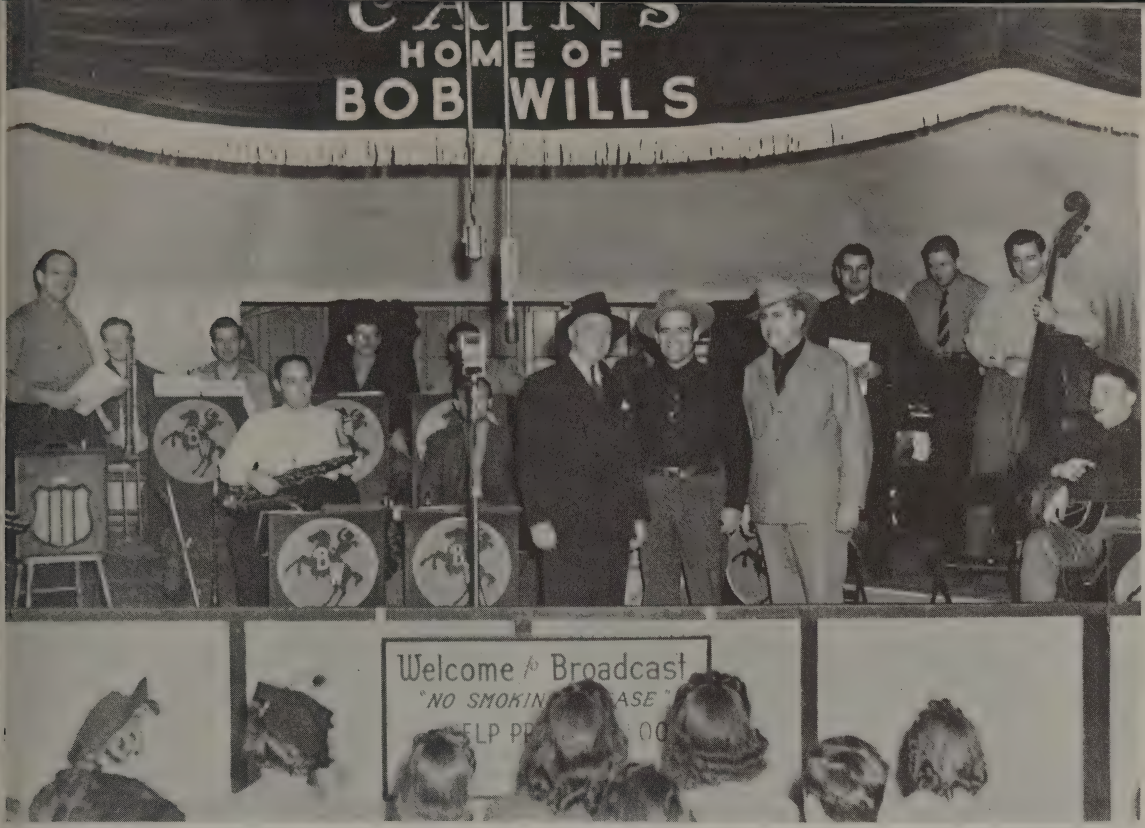


Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys in front of their bus, the "Playboy Limited," 1941. *Kneeling, left to right:* Leon McAuliffe, Benny Strickler, Alex Brashear, Wayne Johnson, Tommy Duncan, Al Stricklin, Don Harlan, Danny Alguire; *standing:* Red Agnew, Lewis Tierney, Darrell Jones, Bob Wills (on Punkin), Gene Tomlins, Woodie Wood, Eldon Shamblin, O. W. Mayo. *(Courtesy Al Stricklin)*

At the Trianon Ballroom, Oklahoma City, 1941. *Left to right:* Leon McAuliffe (steel guitar), unidentified trombonist, Danny Alguire (trumpet), Louis Tierney (saxophone), Benny Strickler (trumpet), Alex Brashear (trumpet), Woodie Wood (saxophone), Bob Wills (fiddle), Don Harlan (saxophone), Gene Tomlins (drums), Wayne Johnson (saxophone), Darrell Jones (bass), Al Bastrop, Eldon Shamblin (guitar), Al Stricklin (piano). *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

Bob Wills and his orchestra, 1941. *Left to right:* O. W. Mayo, Leon McAuliffe (steel guitar), Zeb McNally (saxophone), Claude McCray (trombone), Jamie McIntosh (trumpet), Louis Tierney (saxophone), Tubby Lewis (trumpet), Don Harlan (saxophone), Everett Stover (trumpet), Bob Wills (fiddle), Gene Tomlins (drums), Wayne Johnson (saxophone), Darrell Jones (bass), Al Stricklin (piano), Tommy Duncan (vocals), Eldon Shamblin (guitar). *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

Bob Wills and his orchestra, late 1941 or early 1942. *Left to right:* Eldon Shamblin (guitar), Darrell Jones (bass), Bob Wills (fiddle), Wayne Johnson (saxophone), Gene Tomlins (drums), Tommy Duncan (vocals), Alex Brashear (trumpet), Woodie Wood (saxophone), Benny Strickler (trumpet), Leon McAuliffe (steel guitar), Danny Alguire (trumpet), Louis Tierney (saxophone). *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*



At a noon broadcast, late 1941 or early 1942. *Left to right:* Alan Franklin (announcer), Neil Duer (trombone), Danny Alguire (trumpet), Louis Tierney (saxophone), Benny Strickler (trumpet), Alex Brashear (back row, behind microphone; trumpet), Woodie Wood (front row, behind microphone; saxophone), W. B. Way (vice-president and general manager of KVOO), Bob Wills, O. W. Mayo, Tommy Duncan (vocals), Al Stricklin (piano), Darrell Jones (bass), Eldon Shamblin (guitar). *(Courtesy Wymouth Young, KVOO, Tulsa)*

Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys recording "New San Antonio Rose" with Bing Crosby at Southern Hills Country Club in Tulsa, fall, 1942. *Left to right:* Leon McAuliffe (steel guitar), Bob Wills, Junior Barnard (guitar), Bing Crosby, Millard Kelso (banjo), Johnnie Lee Wills (guitar). *(Courtesy Wymouth Young, KVOO, Tulsa)*

Betty and Bob Wills about the time they married in 1942. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

16

That Certain Woman: Betty and the Summer of '42

I found a dream where dreams had passed me by,
Someone new, someone to take care of a lonely heart. . . .
You were my one lucky star. . . .
Tell me dear that you'll make the dream that I've dreamed
come true.

Bob Wills, "I Found a Dream," 1941

I never regretted it in any way. If I had the thirty-two years to do over, I'd do every one of them just exactly the same.

Betty Wills

The main reason Bob Wills hurried back to Tulsa in the summer of 1942 was his love for a young lady from Sapulpa, a small town near Tulsa. A little over a year earlier, on May 19, 1941, he had met Betty Anderson at a dance at Cain's Academy. A friend sent Betty to the bandstand to request a song. Bob walked over to Miss Anderson and put his hand on her hand, which was gripping a rail at the front of the bandstand. "What can I do for you, little lady?" he asked. She was so captivated by the famous bandleader and movie star that she forgot what she was supposed to request. The only selection she could think of was "You Are My Sunshine," the hit song Bob and Tex Ritter had introduced in the film *Take Me Back to Oklahoma.* This incident became a precious moment in the life of Bob and Betty Wills, and "You Are My Sunshine" became "their" song.

Miss Anderson was small in stature, charming and vivacious, with sparkling dark eyes. Besides her beauty and appealing personality, she was only eighteen years old, and Wills had a penchant for young women. Nevertheless, he was ambivalent regarding her youth, as he once was in the case of Mary Lou. At least he gave that appearance when he asked her aunt, who had brought her to Cain's, "Why, after all of the people you brought to the dances . . . did the only one that ever interested me have to be a damn baby?"[1] Where pretty women, especially young women, were

concerned, Wills was probably never as inhibited as he tried to appear to her aunt, and he had little difficulty in quickly pushing any inhibitions aside. Miss Anderson attended one of his noon broadcasts a few days later, and he made a special effort to speak to her and invite her to another dance.

In late May, Betty talked her mother into taking her to Cain's Academy for a Wills dance. Bob motioned them to the bandstand and after a brief chat said, "I'd like to take you home." Shortly after the music stopped and the dancers were gone, Bob and Betty took her mother home. Then Bob drove his new coupe down Riverside Drive, the windshield wipers moving at high speed, clearing the heavy rain away. Wills cracked his window to allow some of the stale smoke from his pipe to escape. "There were two things I remember from that night," Betty recalled, "how bitter and hurt he seemed to be and how sick I got from that pipe. I literally turned green."

Bob talked more that night about his marriages and "his real disappointments that had come to him" than at any other time, she remembered. "I later thought it was funny because I didn't know anything about his family or his background. I knew nothing about him." Until she met him, she had never listened to his radio show. Betty felt she was the first person he could tell his side of the story to, "a person who didn't know the others." Above all, his bitterness was centered in his marriage and recent divorce proceedings with Mary Lou Wills. It had been less than a month since Deputy Sheriff Nate Martin "served him with summons" that led to the divorce, and in fact, the divorce had not been granted yet; it became final only a few days later, on June 3, 1941.[2] As they rode along the Arkansas River, and as Betty listened and got sicker from pipe smoke, she thought to herself, "He is sure embittered and suspicious, and if I was him I would never think of getting married again."

Bob was prone to hold Mary Lou responsible for their troubles. Yet he made a statement in that smoke-filled coupe which revealed his own immaturity and shallowness in marital affairs. It should have been a penitent confession, but he made it more a crude boast. "He did say that night that he never . . . asked a woman to marry him, that it was assumed—that he woke up from a hangover and discovered he was married and all."

Bob made it clear on his first date with Miss Anderson that he did not intend to ever ask anyone to marry him, because he was through with marriage. His intentions were good and, in his case, wise; he dated Betty for more than fourteen months before they were married. For the first time in several marriages, perhaps the first time ever, Bob took the time to get to know a future spouse. His bad experience with Mary Lou and four other marriages told him something was wrong. When he took Betty home that night he told her he did not know why she would want to go out with

him again, especially after all the talking he had done, but he would like to see her again. When she went into the house, her aunt asked her how she liked the movie star–bandleader. "I don't know. Right now I'm so sick of that pipe," Betty answered. "He has just gone through a terrible time and is so embittered about marriage. I feel sorry for him."[3]

About a week later, Betty and her family went with relatives to visit in Holdenville. Wills and the band were playing a dance there, and Bob asked Betty and her mother to ride back to Tulsa with him. He also invited them to come to more of his dances. Betty began attending them regularly, but she dated Wills only occasionally. In early June, 1941, when she went to Cain's Academy for the regular Thursday night dance, Tommy Duncan told her the band was leaving in a couple of days to make another movie, but that Bob had to fly to Hollywood early.[4] The next morning she received a telegram from Bob asking her to write him at the Hollywood Plaza Hotel. She immediately sent a letter by air mail. When he received it the following day, he made his first long-distance call to Betty—the beginning of a tradition in their relationship. He not only called her every night he was in Hollywood, he called her every night he was away from her the rest of his life.[5] About two weeks after Wills went to California, she got a call from him from the Tulsa airport. She and her family lived in a downtown Tulsa hotel near a restaurant they operated. Bob said, "How soon can you be downstairs?" "By the time you can get here." "I'll bet you can't," Wills joked, as he hurriedly put down the phone. By the time Betty dressed and got to the lobby, "he had already been around the block once." Bob was in Tulsa only a day or so before he returned to Hollywood to complete the film.

When Bob and his Texas Playboys came back to Tulsa in August, 1941, he and Betty "really started dating." Most of their dating involved horseback riding. "He was crazy about horses, and the first time I rode was on Sunday. We rode *all* day long." They generally rode at the Tulsa Fairgrounds or at Bob's ranch with O. W. Mayo and his wife, Cody, and Johnnie Lee Wills and his wife, Irene. "We rode usually on Saturday and Sunday and a lot of times on Tuesday before he would go to Oklahoma City,"[6] Betty said, "and we went to a lot of shows or went on picnics, or on Sunday evenings, we would ride around and listen to the old radio broadcasts. He loved to listen to 'I Love a Mystery' and all those." By Christmas, 1941, "it had become steady dating," Betty said. "I didn't go out with anyone else, didn't think of anyone else." By the time the new year, 1942, began, Miss Anderson was either already in love or falling in love. "Bob would go to the point and talk about being more serious, but Bob was so afraid, we would back away from it," Betty remarked. The first sign he was serious was that he began to keep her away from his dances. "It seemed like he had a fear of people knowing we were dating, that something would be

said about his past marriages or something that would embarrass me . . . or that something would ruin it." After they began dating regularly, Betty never went to "but two or three dances."

Though the famous orchestra leader did not want anyone else to discuss his marital escapades with Miss Anderson, he himself told her a great deal about them in 1942. Perhaps he was concerned that she get only his version. "I became more or less a sounding board," she remarked. "He told me all his problems. Above all, he was very bitter over [his] and Mary Lou's troubles. . . . He was embarrassed by the things she did, such as the fake suicide." (Bob described how Mary Lou staged a suicide and had the police and fire departments at their home.)[7] Because he was so bitter over his recent marriage, Betty learned quickly to avoid Mary Lou's name. If Bob wanted to talk with her about Mary Lou, that was all right; but not even Bob's family dared mention her name.[8] When he talked to Betty about her, Bob blamed Mary Lou almost entirely for their stormy marriage. Interestingly, when he spoke of the other marriages, he felt he was to blame in all of them, Betty said. What bothered Bob most about his difficulties with Mary Lou was his sincere belief that she had been unfaithful to him during their marriage. Mary Lou had recognized this, and one complaint, when she filed for divorce, concerned his accusations of infidelity.[9] Though Bob claimed he knew she had gone out with various men during their marriage, I found no evidence that Mary Lou, or any other of his wives, was unfaithful during marriage to Wills. But to Bob the facts made little difference.

It was this same suspicious, jealous mind that Wills brought to his romance with Miss Anderson. Though he told her he did not want her to attend his dances because she might hear something, true or false, that might embarrass her and break up their relationship, his jealousy was also a factor. A few years later he told Betty frankly that he did not want her at dances because he could not watch her and concentrate on his music at the same time.[10] In Betty's case, Bob was wise enough to make this demand before, not after, they married. This never bothered Betty; she loved him as a man, not as a famous show-business personality. Nevertheless, Bob was jealous and suspicious of her, as he had been of Ruth, Mary Helen, and Mary Lou.

Still, there was a difference—not in Bob, but in the way Betty reacted. Where Ruth and Mary Helen were hurt and offended by Wills's accusations, and Mary Lou would take him to task and fuss and fight with him, Betty's love allowed, perhaps demanded, that she be a sounding post. "When something didn't look right to him or when he would be suspicious in some way," Betty explained, "I tried to tell him in the very beginning that I loved him with all my heart and that I was never going to do anything

that he didn't want me to." She told him if "he would just stop and think and let us talk about it that he would see . . . that it was just in his mind, that he was thinking things up. . . ." For example, when Betty was in downtown Tulsa one day about noon and by chance met the husband of one of Bob's sisters, she mentioned she was going to take a taxi to her parents' home. Since it was several blocks, he drove her rather than have her hire a taxi. When Bob learned of it, he questioned her at length and suggested that such a thing might cause a divorce between the sister and husband. Betty told him she assumed that as "a member of your family," the brother-in-law only wanted to be helpful. When Bob continued to show signs of being hurt and peeved, Betty patiently explained that if he would just think about it a moment he would see that when people have an affair they do not begin by getting into an automobile in downtown Tulsa observed by a large noonday crowd. She added, firmly, "If we had been foolish enough to do such a thing, we certainly would not have gone to my parents' home." Bob saw how ridiculous his suspicions were, apologized, and never mentioned the incident again. As a young woman, still in her teens, Betty recognized the problem of Bob's jealousy, which she characterized as "unreasonableness . . . in the beginning."[11]

The fifteen months between the times Betty and Bob met and married were very difficult for her. "It's hard to go back and explain what the year really was," she reflected, "because every way we turned . . . when we were with other people, there was skepticism and doubt in everybody's mind that I was going the same route he had just been through because of the similarities. She [Mary Lou] was adopted; she was young."[12] Betty also was an adopted child, and she was young. It "seemed like he was repeating the same pattern. He was scared of what people would say and that it wasn't going to be what it apparently was [real love]." Betty said she thought, "If I just was patient. . . . I had to show him. You couldn't say, 'I will be [true].' It just took time to show him . . . that what he wanted was what I wanted."

In the spring of 1942, Bob was thirty-seven and Betty was nineteen, but she possessed a maturity far beyond any Bob would ever have. He could talk of love, but she had the kind of love necessary if they were to marry and have the home and family that had eluded him.[13] By April, 1942, Betty's love and patience had begun to melt some of Wills's skepticism. For the first time he admitted their romance had become serious. Betty never forgot the occasion: it was in front of her house, "and it was hot as it could be in that car." For the first time, Bob told Betty he loved her. He evidently felt he had not said it with enough conviction, so he added, "I really love you." Betty believed their romance was already much more serious than Bob recognized that day. "I don't think he realized how involved he had become or how much we really had together until he left

Tulsa to make the pictures, the eight pictures, in June of '42." At that time they still had never discussed marriage. "When he left," Betty remembered, "it was the idea he would call and I would write."[14]

Bob called every day and—in what may have been a first for him—wrote Betty two letters with his own hand, some of the few letters he ever composed.[15] These two, written in June from the Hollywood Plaza Hotel, provide an insight into Wills's mind, his feeling of insecurity because of a lack of education, and his fear that Betty might not love him enough to be faithful. (The excerpts reproduced here are as Wills wrote them.) "Dont show my letters to anyone cause I write so poor but if you love me you wont care and please love me. . . . Please be true you dont no what it would mean if you didnt it would mean my life I think for I do trust you. . . ." Bob added a second page with the words "no dont read me first" at the top. "darling try to read the other letter first I know it will be hard to do but that is the first one I every wrote you my self I mean with my own little hands." He added, "it may be bad but it means good so be sweet and true and always make me love you. And I will do the same C Bob." On a "monday nite," he wrote her again: "honey I love [you] so much and I do trust you I cant help it when I worry, you know that but I am getting better dont you think so say yes. Well I'm counting the days darling it want be long so just be happy and sweet and true and the world will be mine. . . ."[16]

At least half of this letter is concerned with Betty's being true and Bob's worrying about her faithfulness. Evidently she had reacted to his first letter by trying to assure him on the telephone that he worried too much about her loyalty. She probably revealed that his incessant dwelling on the subject had hurt her. In any case, this second letter shows that he was aware his mistrust was wrong and was painful to her, and that he was trying to do something about it. Betty still had a difficult struggle ahead, but her love, patience, and ability to reason with Bob had already begun to bring results. Bob would always be a jealous man, if not always so much as in 1942, but he was beginning to be sorry for it, ashamed of it.[17] Any time he showed signs of jealousy or falsely accused Betty of wrongdoing, she would talk it out with him, and he would always apologize. His suspicions did not drive them apart as they had with his three former wives. Betty's patient explanations and her questioning of him tended to strengthen the bonds between them.

These letters, and others he wrote Betty within the next few years, also depict Bob's deep feeling for her, a warm, devoted love that his letters to Mary Lou never revealed. In fact, he never once used the term *love* in the seventeen letters he sent to Mary Lou.[18] The differences in tone and choice of words betray what Mary Lou always knew, that he never really loved her and that he loved Betty very much. He had not chosen a young lady

impulsively this time, had not rushed into another marriage, and had not tried to make her into an ideal wife. He fell in love with a woman as she was, not with the ideal wife he hoped to make her. This time it was not planned; neither was it one of his moments of impetuosity and passion, nor something that occurred during a drunken fling. Bob "always married for the wrong ideas or wrong reasons. . . . He married an ideal instead of a compatible woman," one former wife remarked. "From the results of their [Betty and Bob's] marriage, I would say for the first time in his life, he married for the right reasons."[19]

By August, 1942, Bob Wills was convinced that Betty loved him, that she could be trusted, and that she was the woman to become the fifth Mrs. Bob Wills. He was so anxious to tell her of his decision that he decided not to ride home with the band on the big bus. He drove straight through with Luther J. Wills, Joe Holley, and Leon McAuliffe.[20] When he arrived in Tulsa, he saw his family briefly, then drove to Bristow, where Betty's family had recently moved. The first thing he said, after he held Betty in his arms and kissed her, was, "I think we ought to get married." He then showed her the wedding rings he had bought in Hollywood. Though he wanted to get married at once, he told her he did not want her to wear the rings for a while. Betty said he "still had a fear of something happening." For some reason Bob believed their marriage would have a better chance if they married but let no one know about it. Still trying to prove to him that what he wanted, she also wanted, she said, "I want to wear them when you are ready to put them on me." Bob told only his mother about their plans. He drove to Clovis, New Mexico, and Betty went by plane; she met him on August 10, and they were married that day. They drove to Bob's farm at Muleshoe, Texas, for their honeymoon—not exactly the kind one associates with a Hollywood star.[21]

They returned to Oklahoma, where Bob continued to live on his ranch with his family, and Mrs. Bob Wills went to live in Bristow with her parents. The newlyweds gave the appearance they were just dating, and not even Johnnie Lee and Irene knew they were married. They continued to go horseback riding with the Mayos and Johnnie Lee and Irene. On one of those rides, in late September, Betty fell from a horse and suffered a brain concussion. She was in a Tulsa hospital nine days and had not been dismissed when Bob had to return to Hollywood to make the last four movies for Columbia. From the hospital, Betty went back to Bristow. By that time Bob and Betty had told her parents they were married, but she continued to live with them. Bob called every day and was soon asking, "When do you think you can come out?" As soon as she was able, she took the train to Hollywood (Bob did not want her to fly). It was a three-day trip, and she was to make it six or seven times during the nine weeks Wills was making the films—in all, between thirty-six and forty-two days on the

train. She would get there and be with Bob for two or three days, and he then would "go on location." Since he did not want her to be in Los Angeles alone, he would send her home. "One evening I got home in the afternoon. That night around midnight our time, he called. See, he couldn't call those three days [on the train] until I got home. . . . He said, 'I'm back; so when can you come back?' " Betty began packing at once. Her mother asked her where she was going, and when Betty said California, her mother exclaimed, "My God! you just got home today." "So I got right back on, and away I went again."

According to Betty, the trips were not the worst of it. The main problem was to keep anyone from recognizing her after she got there. The boys in the band did not know about the marriage; she was supposed to be in Bristow. "So here I am one day walking down Hollywood Boulevard, and there came Leon McAuliffe and two of the other boys walking down the street toward me, and I thought, 'Wouldn't it be my luck for them to recognize me.' . . . You ought to have seen me getting across that street. They didn't see me." While it may now appear that Wills was having his young bride play foolish games, she felt Bob was trying desperately to make his marriage survive, something he had never been able to accomplish. "What I'm saying is that whatever he wanted during that period was what I wanted. . . . Maybe it seemed farfetched to other people," she admitted, "but that's what seemed to be on his mind, was the fear of somebody breaking it up. . . ."[22]

"What he wanted was what I wanted"—that was Betty's desire for the rest of her married life. She brought the kind of love to Bob Wills that he had dreamed of and had sung about but never believed he would ever find. The title of a song Bob recorded the year he met Betty described what he had done: "I Found a Dream." How could a woman only nineteen cope with Wills's ever-shifting personality, his jealousy, his moodiness, and his drinking? On the surface, this situation seems even harder to explain than the longevity of the appeal of his music. But the answer is found in a brief passage in one of the few books Bob ever read: "love never faileth." It was Betty's love that eventually conquered the restless and troubled mind of Bob Wills. She knew he needed a woman who loved him totally, with such devotion that she would give herself completely. Betty was that kind of woman.

While Mary Lou never met Betty, she knew Bob as well as anyone, except, perhaps, Betty. Analyzing the marriage, Mary Lou remarked, "She had to understand him, and he had to understand her, or it couldn't have lasted under the pressures they would have to live under. Because in any band or music or professional world, there is more pressure than in normal business life. [Bob] married a person who could understand him. He married a woman who had the strength to be strong when he was weak, and, by that weakness, I mean in his negative thinking." Mary Lou con-

tinued, "She must have a great deal of inner strength to be able to keep him on a balanced row which you would have to do with Bob." Perhaps this former wife appreciated Betty's achievement better than anyone else. "Betty had to be a *very special* person and had to have a very certain nature, because I'm sure she lived through every bit of this [the problems Mary Lou had with Bob] and coped with it and handled it. We [the other wives] didn't try. I don't suppose any of us were really in love."[23] Though her statements regarding the other wives might be questioned, Mary Lou certainly showed deep insight into Betty's character.

Betty's love for her husband was not a one-way street by any means. Because Bob always returned her love and kindness, her task of dealing with his jealousy and periodic drinking was made much easier. Otherwise they had few problems, and their marriage would be best described as very happy. "I can never once in my life remember having a serious fight," Betty said. "I never went home to Mother. There was never any need to. . . . I always knew that anything in the world I asked for he would get. I never had any doubts that anytime I needed him, regardless of where he was, if I thought I needed him he would come. I always felt like I was protected, that he understood. He was always the sweetest person in the world all through the years." As an example she referred to the several times she had surgery in the late fifties and early sixties: "I had *so* much illness and all. He was so concerned, so worried that the doctors weren't doing all they could. [He thought] maybe it was the worry of him being on the road, being away, that was helping cause the illness and all. You just couldn't have asked for a more concerned, sweeter person in all that," she concluded. "I never once regretted it in any way. If I had the thirty-two years [of marriage] to do over, I'd do every one of them just exactly the same."[24]

Betty Wills stood by Bob in gloom as in glory, in hard times as in good, in drunkenness as in soberness, and in his long illness after his stroke as in health. The title of Wills's song "Time Changes Everything" is in error in the case of her love, for time never changed it. Nearly thirty years after they became husband and wife, she would be standing by his bedside in a nursing home, hoping he could somehow recover, though medical science said he could not. When everyone else in the world had given up, she loved and nursed him back to life. What looked impossible for Bob Wills in 1941 became a reality the following year. Bob Wills had found that certain woman, and Betty was his forever by the summer of '42.

1. Betty Wills. The lines from "I Found a Dream" are quoted by permission of Wayne Johnson.

2. "Crooner Hits Another Sour Note: Wife Sues Bob Wills," *Tulsa Tribune,* May 15, 1941; "Wills Pays $4000 Alimony After Wife Wins Divorce Here," *Daily Journal-Capital,* (Pawhuska), June 4, 1941. See also the transcript of D[ivorce]-7341, District Court, Osage County, Pawhuska, Okla.

3. Betty Wills.
4. This was Wills's second film, *Go West Young Lady.*
5. Betty Wills. Betty also talked about this on *A Tribute to Bob,* United Artists SP-105.
6. Bob and the Playboys played for dancing every Tuesday night in Oklahoma City at the Trianon Ballroom.
7. Betty Wills.
8. Ibid.; Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House; Johnnie Lee Wills.
9. "Crooner Hits Another Sour Note"; Mary Lou Cloud; Betty Wills.
10. Betty Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; Laverne Wills Burton; Lerlene Stout.
11. Betty Wills.
12. Ibid. Listen also to Mary Lou Cloud.
13. Mary Lou Cloud also commented on Bob's desperate desire for a home and family. She felt that, at least in 1941, he was incapable of building them.
14. Betty Wills.
15. Twelve letters Bob wrote Betty between June, 1942, and November 20, 1946, have survived (copies in my possession). These and a few others are the only letters I have seen in Bob's own hand.
16. Bob Wills to Betty Anderson, June, 1942.
17. Ibid.; Betty Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills.
18. See the letters described in chap. 13.
19. Mary Lou Cloud.
20. Luther J. Wills; Joe Holley; Leon McAuliffe; Ruby Wills Sullivan.
21. Betty Wills.
22. Ibid.
23. Mary Lou Cloud.
24. Betty Wills.

17

"This Is the Army, Mr. Wills"

Fall out of there—this is the army, Mr. Wills.
A sergeant at Fort Sill, Oklahoma

Bob Wills began to bridge the gap between country and western music and big band swing during the forties by presenting the simpler C&W songs in more sophisticated, up-dated arrangements, a compromise that resulted in thousands of dedicated West Coast fans, attracted by the sight of cow-boy attired musicians who sounded more like city-slickers.

George T. Simon, *The Big Bands*

On December 10, 1942, the movies were completed, and Wills and his little group of Texas Playboys returned to Tulsa. Leon McAuliffe and other band members went into the service almost immediately after they returned.[1] Wills himself enlisted and was inducted at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, a few days after Christmas. This marked the end of an era. When Wills went into the army in 1942, he disbanded his big orchestra, and he was never able to put another together quite like it. That band was one reason the Tulsa years were the glory years of his musical career. For the rest of his life, he tried to find another Tulsa, but he never did.[2]

A newspaper in Tulsa reported that Wills was "almost AWOL even before he's in army."[3] Bob tried to make one last noon broadcast before he went to Fort Sill, but he missed the bus that picked up the inductees and had to be taken to the army camp in his Cadillac. Neither his late arrival nor his appearance in an ostentatious automobile probably impressed his superiors. Or maybe it overly impressed them. In any case, they were at first excessively nice to the "crooner, movie star, and band leader."[4] Since Wills arrived late, he was not assigned to a specific barrack that day, but was put in "special barracks." As the sergeant left him, he asked, "Mr. Wills, are these accommodations all right? . . . If we can get you anything just let us know."[5] The next morning (in accordance with their plan) they let him sleep until about eight or eight-thirty. The sergeant went in and pretended

he was taking Wills's order for breakfast. For a moment, Bob believed the army was not so bad. "Bacon and eggs, coffee and toast, please." The sergeant then hollered, as only a sergeant can, "FALL OUT OF THERE—THIS IS THE ARMY, MR. WILLS."[6]

The fact that Wills got off to a bad beginning at Fort Sill was an ominous forecast of the rest of his military career. After a few days at Fort Sill, he boarded a bus with other soldiers for Camp Howze near Gainesville, Texas, where he remained until he was discharged. When Betty moved to Gainesville, she could not find any adequate housing and had to rent a room in a third-rate hotel "over a juke joint and a taxi stand." That was the time Al Dexter's "Pistol Packin' Mama" was so popular, Betty remembered. "I heard that from morning till night from that jukebox downstairs." The best restaurant in Gainesville was off limits to military personnel; the only food other restaurants prepared that was palatable was chicken. "We ate fried chicken every day for thirty days," Betty said.[7]

The chicken Wills could tolerate, but he never liked the army. He admitted he had a chip on his shoulder throughout his army career because he felt he never should have been in the army at all. Thirty-eight was the age limit for the draft, and he went into the service less than three months before his thirty-eighth birthday. Other men in Tulsa, some of them younger than Wills, were not drafted. He always believed he was called up because he was famous. One member of the draft board reportedly boasted he would see to it that Wills went into the army. "I was not a very good soldier," Wills said. "They didn't like me, and I didn't like the army."[8]

Wills took his new Cadillac along to Camp Howze. This got him attention *and* brought him trouble. Most soldiers there did not have cars at all, and even the officers did not have autos as imposing as his. Some enlisted men, assuming only the camp commander could drive such an automobile, stood at attention and saluted Private Wills as he drove through camp.[9] The officers, regardless of rank, never received the attention and respect Wills received. His superiors therefore ordered him not to bring his shiny car on the base again.[10] Furthermore, they ordered him to get it off the base at once. Wills was furious, because men with Fords and Chevrolets could have *their* cars there. Four or five of his buddies waited outside the building where Wills got a dressing down about his car, then accompanied him as he drove the Cadillac outside the base. Wills was mad, and the way he drove revealed this. The Military Police, thinking he was running away, stopped and arrested him and put him in the stockade overnight.[11]

This was the only night Wills ever spent in the guardhouse. However, it started rumors that eventually grew into myths. Because he actually was there one night, fans and soldiers believed he was there nearly every night.

Because he had a reputation for drinking, fans around Gainesville assumed he was in the stockade because of excessive drinking. When his records played on jukeboxes in Nocona, Bowie, Denton, or some other town near Gainesville, someone would say, "Did you know Bob Wills stays drunk at Camp Howze all the time and is in the guardhouse down there now?"[12] Some of these exaggerated tales were taken into town by soldiers from Camp Howze, who merely repeated rumors they heard at the army base. Like most rumors, the more they spread, the more exaggerated they became. One night when Betty and Bob were in their hotel room in Gainesville, they heard a radio newscaster report, "Bob Wills has escaped from the guardhouse at Camp Howze."[13] Rumors about Wills and the guardhouse spread all the way to Tulsa. They got so bad, Bob said, "Papa came all the way to Camp Howze to see about me."[14]

These rumors were, of course, very painful for Bob Wills and his family, but the whole affair was not without humor. The day they threw him in the stockade, in the winter of 1943, they immediately placed a pick and shovel before him and asked if he was as handy with them as he was at driving fancy cars. They put an armed guard over him to make certain he dug and did not try another "escape." As it happened, the young soldier chosen to stand guard was a devout Bob Wills fan. Late that afternoon it was cloudy, sprinkling rain, and nearly dark. The soldier, looking down into the ditch at the famous bandleader, decided he had to relieve his favorite musician's suffering. "Bob, you get up here and hold the gun on me, and I'll dig a while."[15] Prisoner Wills held the gun while his admiring guard dug down in the ditch. This kindness Wills never forgot, and he always enjoyed telling members of his band about the incident. A few years after the war was over, the Texas Playboys were playing for a dance in Lubbock. The dance had just begun, when Wills smiled broadly and walked over to his guitarist, who was busy performing, and said, "Eldon, do you remember the guy I told you about who dug while I held the gun on him at Camp Howze? Well, there he is—he just came through the door."[16] The famous prisoner and his erstwhile guard had a reunion that night, and, needless to say, the former guard was the most honored guest.

In addition to his Cadillac troubles and the typical basic training difficulties, Wills had the added problem of too much mail. A disc jockey in California told his audiences to "write Bob at Camp Howze in Gainesville, Texas."[17] Wills soon began to receive hundreds of letters. It took him a long time to look through them and sort the fan mail from that of his family, close friends, or business associates. But that was not the worst of it. It was the custom at Camp Howze for the soldiers to line up for mail call and step out of the line to receive their mail when their names were called. If Wills received seventy-five pieces of mail, his name was called seventy-five times, and he stepped forward that many times. "Wills," "Wills,"

"Wills," they called out, every other time on some occasions. On other occasions they called "Wills," and after he had taken a letter and was nearly back in line, they called "Wills" again. He first asked the appropriate authorities to please put all his mail in one bundle to save him from the embarrassing ceremony of getting his mail in piecemeal fashion.[18] When the situation did not change, he complained bitterly. This did no good. It was particularly awkward for Wills to have his name called many times when some soldiers went days without receiving even a postal card. He also received gifts, including cakes, cookies, and candy. The authorities refused to honor Wills's request regarding his mail and continued the mail call as usual. He always believed it was done to embarrass him in front of the other soldiers, part of the punishment resulting from the incidents over the Cadillac.[19]

The fact that Wills brought this ostentatious automobile to the army was not altogether bad for him, however. When he began to lend it to some of the officers, they soon forgot the "unfortunate incident" that occurred when Wills was ordered to take it off the base. They told Wills he could take liberties other soldiers were denied. For example, when he and some officers were partying in Fort Worth one night, a friend told Bob he should get back to Camp Howze. Bob smiled and answered that it did not matter when they returned, since the officers would fix things at the camp.[20] For a while the arrangement between Wills and his superiors worked out very well. Eventually, however, the officers' demands for the Cadillac became so great that Wills took it to Tulsa and left it in a storage garage. O. W. Mayo wrote him a fictitious letter informing him that "the parts needed for repairing it are not available."[21] Wills showed the spurious letter to his "friends" at Camp Howze in order to get them off his back regarding his car. It had gotten so bad, some of his superiors saw that he was assigned KP or some other duty, so they could have the Cadillac all to themselves.

The training at Camp Howze was difficult for a man Wills's age. He was thirty-eight in March of 1943, and though the life of a musician had been strenuous and traumatic in many ways, it nevertheless made Wills soft and left him in poor physical condition. The seventeen-mile hikes and other strenuous areas of training revealed that he was not physically fit for the army, and he was discharged from the service on July 27, 1943.[22]

Bob hitchhiked to Tulsa and began looking for musicians to rebuild his orchestra.[23] Nearly every member of his old band had either entered the armed forces or had left Tulsa for one reason or another. Two years earlier, good first-rate musicians were plentiful. In 1943 musicians were very scarce. Bob did not know it then, but this was a forecast of a situation which, in his case, would never get much better. Musicians who played swing and jazz, those who played both stringed instruments and brass and reed instruments, would never again be as plentiful as they were in the

prewar years.[24] Nevertheless, Wills borrowed musicians from Johnnie Lee Wills, picked up others in various places, and put together a band in the summer of 1943. He did this just in time to make several successful tours for the government selling war bonds, a service for which he received several citations.[25]

By the time his discharge became final, Wills had decided to make California his base of operation. Johnnie Lee Wills had combined his own band with the musicians Bob left when he entered the army, but most of them had since gone into the armed services. Johnnie Lee was now established at KVOO and at Cain's, and Bob did not wish to change this. More important, he and Betty felt their marriage had a better chance somewhere other than Oklahoma. Betty believed one reason he had been unsuccessful in marriage was the pressure that had been on him for years. "In his music, life, and family, all was one. He carried the full responsibility. He was trying so hard to make his own family and musicians happy. [This] was what he wanted, not success or money. I don't believe any marriage could have survived in this situation. It was too involved, too much pressure on him."[26] The year in the army matured Bob to the extent that—despite all his help and concern—he thought his sisters and the others could have done better had he not assumed so much responsibility. He had had the same paternalism toward his musicians in Tulsa. The war, however, had shattered his dreams of keeping the old boys together for life on a ranch in New Mexico or Oklahoma or anywhere else. "He saw his dreams would not come true," Betty said. "These musicians were gone." She and Bob agreed that if they were to make any headway they would have to get away from Tulsa.[27]

World War II disrupted the life and music of Bob Wills as it did the lives of most Americans. It marked the end of a great age in American music, the Age of the Big Bands. Very few of the big orchestras were as successful after the war as they were before it, and some did not regroup at all. Like so many orchestra leaders in the postwar years, Wills went to a smaller band, though this was not what he intended or wanted to do.[28]

When Bob was discharged from the army, Betty and her mother went to California to look for a place to live. Housing was scarcer in California than musicians were in Tulsa, however, and Betty flew back to Tulsa to be with Bob. By late September he had made a start at rebuilding his band. He hired Alex Brashear as arranger and trumpet player, Joe Holley on violin, and Laura Lee Owens as the first "girl singer" he ever had in his band. Tommy Duncan had learned that he was to be discharged soon and promised to join them in California.[29]

In September, 1943, the "Playboy Limited" took the Texas Playboys to their new home in California. Bob and Betty went by car to Los Angeles and after a few days were able to rent a house. The band began broadcast-

ing Monday through Friday, 12:01 to 1:00 P.M., over KMTR (now KLAC), Los Angeles.[30] They were also regulars at the Mission Beach Ballroom in San Diego, where they played for dancing every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday night. Crowds were larger than when Wills was in California the year before. Most people had more money than they had ever had, and they wanted to dance, have a good time, and forget the horrors of war.[31]

Bob and Betty bought a house in the San Fernando Valley. Bob had Johnnie Lee bring some of his horses to his "ranch" (he was always embarrassed at what Californians called ranches). It was near KMTR, thus convenient for the daily radio shows, and close to Hollywood, where Wills was soon making movies again (on September 21, 1943, he began *Cowboy Canteen* for Columbia Pictures).[32] It was probably too close to Hollywood to please him. He liked California, but not Hollywood. Though he admired talent and the stars, he did not care at all for the hangers-on, the underlings, and the henchmen that lived off the stars like human leeches. And these people seemed more ubiquitous in Hollywood than oil wells in Tulsa.[33]

Bob Wills's dislike of Hollywood did not prevent his taking on some of the movieland facade. He had begun to do so during the filming of *Go West Young Lady* in 1941, when he bought a $4,400 "cowboy outfit." Before returning to Tulsa, he bought a $3,500 saddle with solid gold and silver trim. He paid $650 for matching chaps and vest plus $250 for a pair of gold and silver spurs. He also bought a 157-year-old Gaudagnini violin, for which he paid $3,000. Three years later, he gave that violin, as he told a reporter, "to a friend of mine in Tayxas" and bought another for $5,000. He also purchased a $10,000 diamond stickpin. In typical Hollywood style, he began "leaking" these things to the press. For example, the story "happened" to get into a Los Angeles paper that Wills "plunked down $5,000 in cash for that violin." Newspapers also reported that his hotel room was burglarized and that he lost $11,250 in jewelry; the story of his $10,000 diamond stickpin was included.[34] He gave the press pictures of himself riding a horse, both outfitted with Hollywood regalia. When *Go West Young Lady* premiered in Tulsa, Wills, dressed in his gold- and silver-mounted chaps, vest, and spurs, and sitting on his gold- and silver-mounted saddle astride his favorite horse, rode onto the stage of the Rialto Theatre. About the same time, Wills (or his agents) also began leaking to the press the claim that his income taxes were exorbitant. One paper stated, "He pays more income tax than a Wall Street broker."[35]

There were at least two reasons for all this extravagance and publicity. First, Wills was in show business and had to "stay before the public." There was doubtlessly a good deal of egotism involved, also. Like most poor people who rise in the world, particularly to stardom, Wills practiced what Thorstein Veblen called conspicuous consumption, in order to show Tul-

Bob Wills, about 1942. *(Courtesy Gertrude Wills Fowler)*

Private Bob Wills and Punkin, 1943. *(Courtesy Eloise Wills House)*

United States bond rally at Pawhuska, Oklahoma, 1943. *Left to right:* Les Anderson (steel guitar), Louis Tierney (fiddle), unidentified man, Bob Wills, unidentified man, David Randolph Milsten (at microphone), Johnnie Lee Wills. *(Courtesy David Randolph Milsten)*

Bob Wills leading Punkin (not "Pumpkin," as over the stall) and Tommy Duncan leading Victory at Wills's ranch in the San Fernando Valley, 1943. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

Betty and Bob Wills on their ranch in the San Fernando Valley, 1943. *(Courtesy Rip Ramsey)*

People crowd around the bandstand at a Bob Wills dance in California during World War II, probably early 1944. *Left to right:* Louis Tierney (fiddle), Bob Wills (fiddle), Tommy Duncan (vocals), Rip Ramsey (bass), unidentified trumpeter, Tiny Mott (saxophone). *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

A bandstand crowd at a Bob Wills dance in the mid-1940s. *Left to right:* Joe Holley (fiddle), Bob Wills (fiddle), Tommy Duncan. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

Bob Wills with his 157-year-old Guadagnini violin, 1943. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

At the Pacific Square Ballroom in San Diego, 1943. *(Courtesy Blanche Baker)*

Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys greet Arthur E. Satherley, 1944. *Left to right:* Rip Ramsey (bass), Noel Boggs (steel guitar), unidentified man, Monte Mountjoy (drums), Jimmy Wyble (guitar), Teddy Adams (bass), Bob Wills (fiddle), unidentified man (standing), Cameron Hill (guitar), Millard Kelso (piano), Arthur E. Satherley, Joe Holley, Tommy Duncan. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys, Los Angeles, 1944. *Standing, left to right:* Everett Stover, Louis Tierney, Tommy Duncan, Laura Lee Owens, Bob Wills, Cameron Hill, Tiny Mott; *kneeling:* Les Anderson, Jimmy Wyble, Rip Ramsey, Monte Mountjoy, Millard Kelso. *(Courtesy Rip Ramsey)*

Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys at the Casa Maña in California, 1943. *Left to right:* Noel Boggs (steel guitar), Jack McElroy, Joe Holley (fiddle), Joe Galbraith, Louis Tierney (fiddle), Billy Jack Wills (drums), Rip Ramsey (bass), Bob Wills (fiddle), Millard Kelso (piano), Jimmy Wyble (guitar), Laura Lee Owens (vocals), Cameron Hill (guitar), Tommy Duncan (vocals). *(Courtesy Rip Ramsey)*

sa, the world, and himself that he was a *star.* Wills, like so many who enjoy limited success in the movies, mimicked some of the worst aspects of Hollywood. Fortunately, he outgrew this theatrical puberty in a few years and came to pride himself in the slogan Nothing Fancy, Just Good Music.[36] Later in his career, he was very critical of western musicians who "dressed fancy" and were "too showy." By then Bob seemed to have forgotten that, like so much else in western music, he also helped pioneer this "Hollywoodishness."

When the Music Corporation of America began to manage Wills's organization in 1944, it was tantamount to recognition of Wills as one of the top orchestra leaders in the country, since MCA was then managing most of the leading dance orchestras. During the last few years of World War II and the four or five years after war's end, Bob Wills was compared not with country-and-western bands, but with the big swing bands with which he competed.[37] This was where he believed he belonged musically—where he *wanted* to be. Fortunately for Wills, however, he did not fit there exactly. His music, except when he used an all-horn band, had enough folkishness about it that he was not so limited as the big swing bands. By the early fifties, when the Age of the Big Band had ended,[38] smaller groups were becoming popular. More folk-oriented music, such as rhythm-and-blues, rock, and country-and-western, began to enjoy a popularity similar to that of the swing bands of the thirties and forties. By the late forties and early fifties, Wills also went—of necessity, not by desire or choice—to a smaller string band.[39] He considered having to give up his seventeen-piece orchestra, with horns and strings combined, one of his greatest tragedies, but it was a blessing in disguise. Had this not happened, his career probably would have ended with the Swing Age.

At the end of his career, in the early seventies, his music still sounded modern, because of the emphasis rock and country music put on guitars and other stringed instruments. This was one reason Wills continued to get such a response twenty-five years longer than some of the swing bands he admired so very much. It accounts, in part, for his continued influence on rock and country music. His use of guitars, violins, and other strings has led many people who heard only his bands and recordings of the fifties and sixties to think of his music merely as country-and-western and fail to appreciate the fact that he was also part of the Big-Band Age.

Unfortunately, trade journalists, disc jockeys, and historians have also oversimplified and distorted Wills's place in the history of American music by lumping him with country-and-western. Bob himself knew, and was proud, that he was much more. George T. Simon, author of *The Big Bands,* editor of *Metronome* for sixteen years, jazz commentator for the *New York Herald Tribune,* and an organizer of the Glenn Miller band, has offered a more accurate appraisal. He included Wills in *The Big Bands,* the only

western swing bandleader to be so honored. "Bob Wills began to bridge the gap between country and western music and big band swing during the forties by presenting the simpler C&W songs in more sophisticated, updated arrangements," Simon wrote, "a compromise that resulted in thousands of dedicated West Coast fans, attracted by the sight of cow-boy attired musicians *who sounded more like city-slickers* [italics mine]."[40]

From the standpoints of both financial success and prestige and recognition as a bandleader, the years from 1943 to the early fifties were Bob's best.[41] Had his career and life ended then, they would have ended happily, because he had achieved his greatest goal in music. For a man who was once belittled as hillbilly, there was great satisfaction in having one of the most successful dance orchestras and big swing bands in the nation. By that time he had had some of the best-selling records in the country; others were recording his compositions and selling at least as many copies as he himself sold. He had made many movies and would make many more. He had broken attendance records at dances from the Mississippi to the West Coast and would break many more.[42] As a musical pioneer, he achieved all this against great odds. His music was new; it was different, uninhibited, and often radical. Human nature being what it is, not even Wills himself should have expected other musicians and the entertainment establishment to welcome his music with open arms. Nevertheless, by the time he moved to California in 1943, it had, as one California newspaper put it, "caught on." Some musicians still scoffed at it and always would. But the public (and fortunately that is what is important in a free society with free media) liked it.[43]

1. Leon McAuliffe.

2. Betty Wills; Bob Wills. Wills was ordered to report on December 15, 1942, at 2:30 P.M. at the "Clinic—602 So. Cheyenne" in Tulsa for his physical examination (Local Draft Board No. 1 to James Robert Wills, Dec. 10, 1942). According to "Bob (Ahaaaa) Wills," *Hillbilly and Western Jamboree,* Aug., 1948, p. 5, thirteen of the original band members went into the service. Listen also to Joe Holley; Alex Brashear; Harley Huggins.

3. "Bob Wills Quits Music Career, Enlists in Army under Deadline," *Tulsa Daily World,* Dec. 16, 1942.

4. Ibid; *Tulsa World,* Jan. 3, 1943; "Hillbilly Music—Master Can't Forget Experience," *Ponca City News,* Jan. 12, 1943; Rosetta Wills Arnett Scrapbook.

5. O. W. Mayo; Son Lansford; Bob Wills.

6. Bob Wills; Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook; Robbie Wills Calhoun; Edna Wills Scrapbook; Herman Arnspiger Scrapbook; Ada Perry Scrapbook; Phillip Banister Scrapbook.

7. Betty Wills.

8. Bob Wills; Betty Wills.

9. Ibid.

10. Weldon Stovall, field notes. Stovall was the detachment first sergeant of the unit in which Wills served at Gainesville.

11. Bob Wills; Betty Wills.

12. I have heard this from many sources. One man told me that he was in the stockade for four months at Camp Howze for going AWOL and that Wills was there most of that

time for being drunk (confidential communication). I have found no evidence to justify this assertion, only rumor. Weldon Stovall said this story was absolutely false.

13. Betty Wills.

14. Bob Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills.

15. Bob Wills.

16. Ibid.; Eldon Shamblin.

17. Betty Wills.

18. Bob Wills.

19. Ibid.

20. Confidential communication.

21. O. W. Mayo; Bob Wills; Betty Wills.

22. Weldon Stovall. Stovall said all the rumors about Wills's being drunk all the time, as well as the story that he was discharged because of drunkenness were without foundation; any such discharge would have to have had his approval. Other than the incident over the car Wills never gave the unit any trouble. When Wills joined American Legion Post No. 35 in Oklahoma, that post gave a good deal of publicity to his membership in an effort to offset the false rumors that he has been dishonorably discharged because of drunkenness. See especially "A Rumor Only," *Oklahoma Legion News* (Oklahoma City), 1, no. 2 (Dec., 1949), 1.

23. Betty Wills.

24. Bob Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; Eldon Shamblin; Danny Alguire.

25. Bob Wills and Betty Wills Scrapbook; Ada Perry Scrapbook; Al Stricklin Scrapbook; Betty Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; Bob Wills; O. W. Mayo. See especially David Randolph Milsten; Milsten to me, Jan. 5, 11, 1974; and his personal notes on Wills entitled "Memorandum." Milsten was with Wills on some of the war bond campaigns in Oklahoma.

26. Betty Wills.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.; Bob Wills.

29. Corine Andrews; Joe Andrews; Eldon Shamblin; Laura Lee Owens; "Laura Lee Remembers," *Country Music Reporter,* 3, no. 7 (Dec., 1972), 7; Joe Holley; Alex Brashear.

30. Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook; Rip Ramsey; Laura Lee Owens.

31. " 'Texas Playboys' Returning to Beach," *San Diego Union,* Dec. 2, 1943; "Wills and His Drugstore Cowboys Hitch Horns to TC AMP Tuesday: 'Santone Rose' Author Brings Range Rhythm," *Beam* (Los Angeles), May 23, 1944; "Wills Licks Gives Hicks Kicks: Real Cowboy Music Wins Plaudits of Audience in Buckaroo Country," *Variety,* 17, no. 32 (n.d.), 1; Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook; Danny Alguire; Laura Lee Owens; Rip Ramsey.

32. George E. Marshall, Jr., Columbia Pictures, to me, Mar. 7, 1975.

33. Betty Wills.

34. "Bob Wills Film with Cast of Notables to Open Here," *Tulsa Daily World,* Oct. 29, 1941; Erskine Johnson, "Fiddler Is Music Phenomenon," *Daily News* (Los Angeles), Apr. 26, 1944. See also the stories and pictures concerning Bob's "cowboy outfit" in Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook.

35. Ibid.; "Strictly by Ear," *Time,* Feb. 11, 1946, pp. 49–50; Ada Perry Scrapbook; Al Stricklin Scrapbook; Joe Ferguson Scrapbook; O. W. Mayo Scrapbook.

36. George Rhoades, " 'Nothing Fancy, Just Good Music': Texas Playboy Improves," *Tulsa Daily World,* Dec. 2, 1962.

37. See the Music Corporation of America's advertisements on their client Bob Wills in *Billboard 1944 Music Year Book,* pp. 346–347, and *Variety,* May 31, 1944, p. 56. See also T.E.Y., "Disc-Delving Highlights and Sidelights—Our Guest Band Leader," *Daily News* (Los Angeles), Dec. 5, 1942. From the mid- to late forties, only the big swing bands, like those of Harry James, Tommy Dorsey, Count Basie, and Benny Goodman, had sufficient popularity to allow them to compete with Bob Wills. Few, if any, country or western swing bands had the appeal to compete with him.

38. See especially George T. Simon, *The Big Bands,* rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan Co., 1971), pp. 513–552.

39. Bob Wills; Betty Wills.

40. Simon, *Big Bands,* p. 512 (emphasis mine).

41. Wills was named bandleader of the week and was special guest on the "Lamplighter's Disc-Delving" show in Los Angeles in 1942. See T.E.Y., "Disc-Delving Highlights."

42. " 'Texas Playboys' Returning to Beach." According to an advertisement paid for by the Mission Beach Ballroom, Wills "shattered every San Diego record" during an engagement there just after the war (Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook). Wills broke all records at the Golden Gate Theatre in San Francisco in 1944; see "Wills and His Drugstore Cowboys Hitch Horns." See also "Wills Gives Hicks Kicks"; Rip Ramsey; Eldon Shamblin.

43. John Grissim, *Country Music: White Man's Blues* (New York: Paperback Library, 1970), p. 115. See also Bob Healy, Bob Pinson, Glenn P. White, "Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys: A Bio-Discography," *Record Research,* No. 79 (Oct., 1966), pp. 3–5.

18

"Take Me Back to Tulsa"

Bob always tried to establish the same thing he had in Tulsa.
Betty Wills

At first it appeared that Wills and his band were going to be able to settle in the Los Angeles area and establish a dance circuit in Central and Southern California that would make it possible for them to drive home every night, or almost every night. As Betty Wills explained, "Bob always tried to establish the same thing he had in Tulsa." The title of one of Wills's most popular recordings, "Take Me Back to Tulsa," suggests what Wills tried to do in California in the mid- and late forties, and actually for the rest of his career. When the band played "Take Me Back to Tulsa," he must have often thought of the glory years in Tulsa and hoped he would find another place, life, and band like he had had there. He made more money in California and on his tours than he had in Tulsa; he also gained more acclaim and success. But he never had another band like the Tulsa bands, and he never enjoyed his music quite so much.[1] Moreover, he had to be gone from home months at a time, and what had been fun in Tulsa became less fun and often work, especially on national tours, when he was based in California. There was a sense of the tragic and the pathetic in the life of Bob Wills, which stemmed from his fruitless twenty-year search for another Tulsa.

One of the difficulties Wills and other bandleaders faced after the war was the problem of getting musicians. It was a special problem for Wills because he hired not only good musicians, but ones who fit the band. Even when he could hire this kind of musician, it was difficult to keep him. Wills soon learned that many of the musicians he employed after the war lacked the loyalty his old boys had. Many of the postwar musicians thought of themselves, whereas the Texas Playboys before the war had been concerned about the good of the whole band.[2] One reason was that jobs were plentiful for musicians during and after the war. As Eldon Shamblin remarked, "They are often a temperamental bunch anyway. And after the

war, they would walk out if something did not please them."[3] Wills had never worked musicians who went by the union book, either. Though he had always paid above union scale, his men in Tulsa were flexible regarding pay for travel to and from a job and did not go by the book relative to the time a job started and ended. He did not have any such problem after the war with his prewar musicians who returned to the band, such as Tommy Duncan, Joe Holley, Alex Brashear, Jesse Ashlock, and Eldon Shamblin. But he did with some of the newer musicians.[4]

Bob Wills was not only determined to establish a dance circuit in California like he had in Tulsa, he also wanted a big orchestra like those he had in the late thirties and early forties. In early 1944 he put together the largest orchestra he ever led. It numbered twenty-two instrumentalists plus two vocalists. He had four violins, three guitars, bass, piano, four saxophones, four trumpets, four trombones, drums, and the two singers. He actually had two bands in one, as in Tulsa, a horn band and a string band, and musically, it was one of the best organizations he had after leaving there. He hired some of the horn men who had played in the Jimmy Dorsey and Glenn Miller orchestras before the war. Rip Ramsey said the orchestra played the most beautiful music he ever heard.[5]

Unfortunately, this orchestra never had a recording session, and no tapes, transcriptions, "air shots" (recordings made from radio broadcasts), or private recordings of its music have been found. For a number of reasons Wills never kept this orchestra together. It lasted no more than six or seven months. First of all, the horn musicians, in particular, insisted on playing by union rules; some of them did not want to travel, while others refused to go on national tours.[6] Second, Wills discovered that, although his orchestra was different from other large swing bands on the West Coast (strings and horns gave him more versatility), he was nevertheless competing with Harry James and other orchestras Wills called "the best."[7] As far as drawing crowds was concerned, Wills could compete with any of them and outdraw most. However distinctive his big orchestra had been in Tulsa before the war, though, such an orchestra was only one of many in California in 1944. Third, despite all the fine musicians he had hired, the people requested selections Wills could do with just a string band and one trumpet. They came to see and hear Bob Wills and his fiddle, not a full orchestra. Wills just did not have to have the expensive orchestra he was paying.

All these factors probably would not have caused Wills to disband his big orchestra. He loved their kind of music too much and was proud of their versatility. Perhaps the main reason he gave it up was a psychological problem; at least that was the immediate cause. Probably due to his lack of formal musical training and education, Wills imagined people made fun of his uninhibited antics on the bandstand, if not of his music, also. He was

especially sensitive around musicians from famous "reading bands." He mentioned to Rip Ramsey and Noel Boggs, for instance, that he thought some of the musicians from the Dorsey and Miller bands were "blowing him off" (making fun of him).[8] On a train trip to the Pacific Northwest, when Ramsey asked these musicians about this, they told him they liked their jobs with Wills better than any they had ever had and that they admired Wills as a musician and appreciated his showmanship as well. All this was only in Wills's mind, they said.[9] After they completed a very successful series of engagements in Oregon and were on the train back to Los Angeles, Wills got drunk and either fired or threatened to fire nearly all his horn men. He then fired Rip Ramsey for questioning his decision and defending the horn musicians. Rip told him he was wrong, that the horn men were not making fun of him. Bob apologized to Rip, asked him to stay in the band, and by the time they reached Los Angeles reversed his decision to dismiss the horn musicians. Nevertheless, he broke up his big band shortly after he returned from the Pacific Northwest. This ended the life of Wills's largest postwar orchestra.[10] He never again had one of comparable size or quality. He kept Alex Brashear on trumpet and later added clarinet and saxophone players, but never in the same proportions as in this orchestra.

Before the war Wills had two front lines, one made up of horns and one of fiddles. After 1944 fiddles made up his principal front line; he also used guitars in that capacity. From 1934 to 1940, Wills varied his music by alternating his front line between horns and strings. From 1940 through 1942, when he moved to a big swing-band sound, he gave prominence to the horns. After 1944 stringed instruments were dominant. This is not to suggest that both kinds of instruments were not important in each period. Nevertheless, World War II marked a watershed in Wills's music.[11]

This watershed was a matter of emphasis, not of basic musical and stylistic changes. Though Wills did not use the more traditional jazz instruments so much after the war, his musicians who played strings continued to play them as they always had in his band, to produce jazz and swing music. This was true of all the instruments: piano, trumpet, saxophone, clarinet, and drums, not just the strings. Wills kept his combination of jazz and stringed instruments; but to make his music more distinctive, and because it became increasingly difficult to find suitable horn musicians, he began to emphasize strings. After the war he rarely had enough horns to use them as a front line as he would have liked. Brass and reeds therefore shared melodic lines and phrases with stringed instruments, took jazz choruses, filled in breaks and spaces behind other instruments or vocalists, and occasionally shared the front-line spotlight with fiddles or guitars. As the importance of the horns decreased in the postwar years, the importance of the strings increased.

Fiddles, in particular, became more important after the war. There were generally more of them in the band, and they were used to a greater extent, particularly as a front line and as an ensemble. There was no change in their use in choruses. Jesse Ashlock, Louis Tierney, Joe Holley, Johnny Gimble, Keith Coleman, and other hot fiddlers often played pure jazz in their choruses. The hot or jazz fiddle became a trademark of Wills's music, and it was part of his style from the early 1930s until his last recordings, in the early 1970s. The dixieland style was still basic to Wills's music after the war and remained so to the end of his career.[12]

The guitarists in Wills's postwar band also continued to use their guitars like traditional jazz or swing instruments. They took choruses and improvised as jazz musicians do with trumpet or trombone. After the war Wills used guitars more than ever before, largely because he had fewer horn musicians than guitarists. This use of guitars is a good example of the abiding influence of the swing bands: when Wills no longer had enough reeds and brass to provide the traditional swing-band sound, he often relied on the guitars to simulate it. In the postwar band, guitar work was generally hotter, especially that of Junior Barnard, Cameron Hill, and Jimmy Wyble. While Wills's prewar guitarists, such as Eldon Shamblin, were greatly influenced by Eddie Lang and his more subdued style, the postwar guitarists, such as Wyble and Hill, were influenced by Charlie Christian.[13] By the mid-forties the pioneer efforts of Christian, Shamblin, McAuliffe, and others had already begun to change the role of the guitar in jazz and dance music. In Wills's postwar band, Wyble, Hill, Barnard, and the venerable Shamblin made the guitar even more prominent than in the Tulsa band, second in importance only to the violins. Wills continued to use steel guitars as he had before the war. He often combined guitars, steel guitars, and amplified mandolins into a string ensemble to simulate a big-band horn section.[14]

Not only did the dixieland jazz and swing influence continue in Wills's music after the war, the folk music he had learned down between the rivers also remained an important aspect. In some respects this influence was more obvious after the war than it was even in his earlier years in Tulsa. Wills had a national reputation as a fiddler, and his fans wanted to hear him play his fiddle, just as audiences demanded to hear Harry James's trumpet or Benny Goodman's clarinet. At public appearances fans always requested the fiddle tunes that helped make Wills famous,[15] and he therefore began to feature his own fiddle more. Wills was so popular after the war that he could get along without the large bands and orchestras he used when he was building his reputation in the 1930s.

In 1944, Bob signed a contract with the Music Corporation of America to handle all his bookings.[16] They handled many of the big names, such as Harry James, Bob Crosby, and Kay Kyser; they helped make Wills an

even more famous artist. However, they booked him where they could get both Wills and themselves the most money, regardless of where it was, which worked against Wills's desire to establish himself in California so he would not have to be away from home very often. MCA booked him on his first cross-country tour, scheduling it for the winter of 1944–45.[17] Before Wills left, he and a few of the Playboys made three movies. Two were westerns with Russell Hayden; the third, *Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys,* was a Warner Brothers production about Bob's life.[18]

In November, Bob left on the first of many cross-country tours he reluctantly made during the next twenty-five years (in one of those years he was home only seventeen days).[19] This was a combination dance-show tour, with the latter part billed as Bob Wills and his Great Vaudeville Show.[20] There were thirty-nine entertainers in the troupe, thirteen of them in the band. Bob, Jesse Ashlock, and Joe Holley played violins; Alex Brashear, trumpet; Rip Ramsey, bass; Noel Boggs, steel guitar; Jimmy Wyble and Cameron Hill, electric guitars; Monte Mountjoy, drums; Millard Kelso, piano. Tommy Duncan and Laura Lee Owens provided the vocals. Bob's father, John Wills, also went along and played an old-time fiddle tune at every performance. Eck Robertson would surely have thought his old rival from Turkey had come up in the world had he seen some of the places John Wills fiddled on that tour.

Besides dances, the troupe played a week at the Saint Charles Theatre in New Orleans, a week at the Municipal Auditorium in Birmingham,[21] and a week at the Kentucky Theatre in Louisville. Just before Christmas they began an engagement at the Oriental Theatre in Chicago which lasted several weeks.[22] Some of the musicians frequented the many nightclubs in the Windy City, and Rip Ramsey, Joe Holley, and other band members "set in" with Louis Armstrong, Henry "Red" Allen, J. C. Higginbotham, and other jazz greats at the Down Beat Room.[23] Bob had some fine jazzmen with him at this time, several of them from a jazz background. Alex Brashear, for example, came to Bob from Norma Teagarden's jazz band in 1941; Monte Mountjoy played drums for Red Nichols before he joined Bob, and later he recorded with the Firehouse Five plus Two.[24] Jimmy Wyble had a national reputation as a jazz guitarist; he had played with Peck Kelly in his early years, and after leaving Wills he played and recorded with K. "Red" Norvo and Benny Goodman.[25] As one of his musicians of that period said, "Bob always collected these sort of people . . . that were good jazz musicians."[26]

The Bob Wills show returned to Hollywood in late January, 1945. Wills and the band were scheduled for a recording session with Columbia there on January 24. The personnel remained about the same as on the tour. This was Wills's first recording session since July, 1942, and it reflected the trend his music took in the postwar years. The group was

smaller, dominated by strings, and the music was more distinctively Bob Wills—written either by him or primarily for him. Even when he recorded music composed by someone else, he gave it in his own western jazz and swing style; by the mid-forties, he was famous enough that when he recorded a selection it generally became known as a "Bob Wills song."[27] It was not that he had quit playing ragtime, blues, stomps, jazz, pop songs, race music, and old-time fiddle tunes. His repertory at dances and for radio and television was about the same as it was with the prewar bands.[28] He recorded more of his own material simply because he received more money when he did.

The old problem that Columbia Records had had of categorizing his music was still there. Wills and others began calling it "western swing." This was another way of saying it was "Bob Wills music." *Western jazz* would have been more correct. But since it was the Swing Era and Wills was closer to the big swing bands than to anything else in American music, the term *western swing* was used. In the postwar years musicians in Nashville began to borrow more heavily from Wills than ever before; his different use of the fiddle, guitar, and other stringed instruments appealed to them. His influence on country music became so evident that trade journals began to label both his western swing and Nashville music as country-and-western. While it is true that Wills influenced what was later called the Nashville sound, such categorization in this case distorts more than it elucidates.[29]

In January of 1945, Wills recorded several songs that became hits. "Hang Your Head in Shame," "Texas Playboy Rag," "Roly Poly," and "Stay a Little Longer" all combined the frontier fiddle music Wills was famous for with his New Orleans jazz style. The war that still raged in Europe and Asia prompted a song predicting the defeat of the Axis, "Smoke on the Water." On April 20, the band recorded four sides in Hollywood; two were war songs, "Stars and Stripes on Iwo Jima" and "Silver Dew on the Blue Grass Tonight." Both were big sellers, as was "New Spanish Two Step" (the old fiddle tune with lyrics). On October 3, they recorded again in Hollywood, and again half the selections were war songs which became hits: "Empty Chair at the Christmas Table" and "White Cross on Okinawa."

Nineteen forty-five was a busy and successful year for Wills in many ways. Besides the three recording sessions, he made some movies and worked in a full dance schedule and another national tour.[30] Even more important for Bob and Betty, their first child, James Robert Wills II, was born on April 4 in Santa Monica. It is a commentary on both Bob's income and the medical profession that the doctor—who charged according to one's ability to pay—sent Bob a bill for $2,200. Though Wills naturally complained about such an excessive fee, he could afford it.[31]

In the postwar years, success came to Wills and his Texas Playboys at every turn. Nearly every record they cut was a hit or at least sold out in most

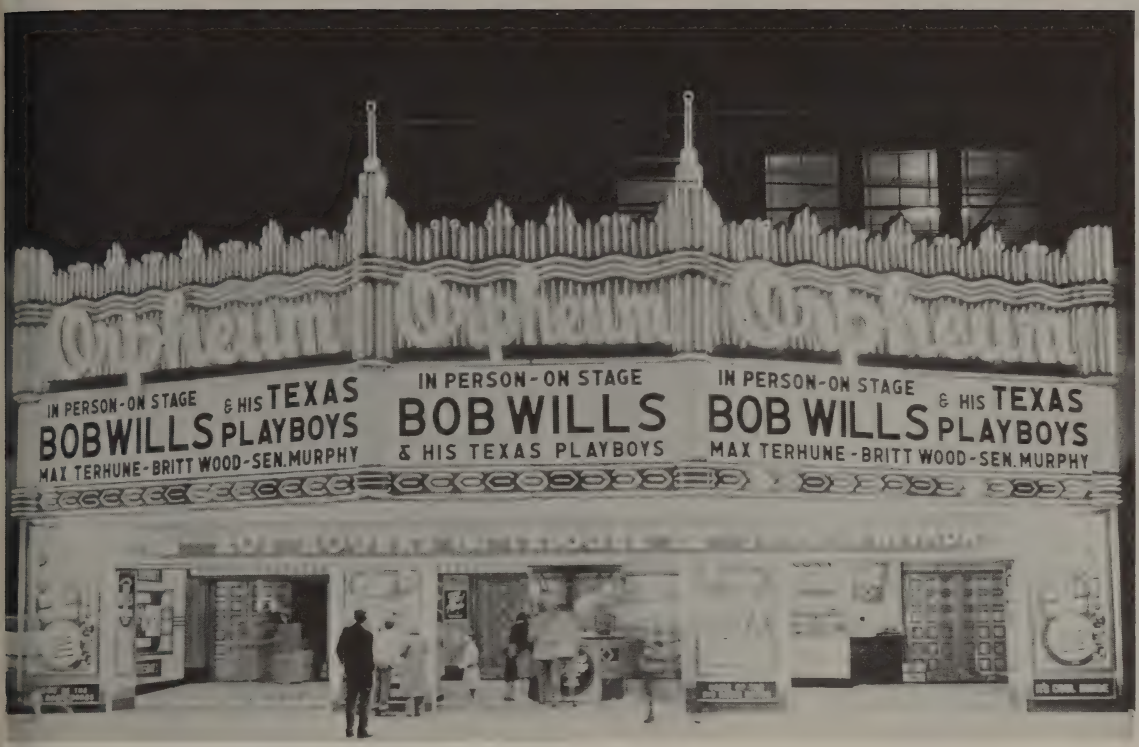
shops. When Wills could not provide enough new recordings to satisfy the demand, Columbia decided to reissue some of his prewar material originally released on Vocalion as far back as 1935. In a single year, 1947, Columbia reissued seventy Bob Wills recordings, and many of these sold better than when they were first issued.[32] Thousands came to his dances; in many instances attendance records were broken and people were turned away.[33] The famous swing orchestras in California discovered that many of their followers were leaving to dance to Bob Wills's western swing. Wills was in such demand, some places booked him any time he had an open date, regardless of how undesirable.[34] As the management of one popular dance auditorium admitted, "Although Monday night dancing is frankly an experiment it was the only night of the week on which this outstanding band could be secured."[35] Dance audiences across the nation thrilled Bob and the Playboys by requesting not only their latest releases, but older, prewar selections also.[36] One manager remarked that "Wills' part" for three dances in Portland, Oregon, in 1945 was $36,000.[37] The Music Corporation of America reported in *Variety* in 1944 that Bob Wills "broke every attendance record" at several places in California. He grossed $15,000 in two nights at Mission Beach in San Diego; $19,000 in two nights at the Oakland Auditorium; $21,000 for two dances at Venice Pier in Venice; and $16,000 for one night at the Tulsa Coliseum.[38] "Bob Wills recently broke all records in Oakland, Cal., appearance, outgrossed even Tommy Dorsey and Benny Goodman's outfits," observed one writer.[39] Another newspaper reported, "Bob Wills had appeared at one place twice and broke records both times topping such names as Bob Crosby and Xavier Cugat."[40] In 1944, Hedda Hopper wrote in her column "Looking at Hollywood," "Bob Wills turned down one day's work in 'Girl Rush' at $5,000 by saying, 'My boys need sleep. We've come from Seattle, had to change buses and trains so often we didn't get a wink. You keep the cash, we'll take the sleep.' "[41] Two years later *Time* interviewed Wills and reported that his income for 1945 was $340,000.[42]

These figures are not so imposing today as they were in the forties and early fifties. Most dance orchestras then were still playing for prewar admission prices, one dollar or one dollar and a half per person. Wills was certainly among the highest-earning orchestra leaders at the time,[43] though some stories were told (and are still told) that exaggerated his earnings. One which turned up in newspapers from the early until the late forties stated that Wills paid more income tax than any orchestra leader in the country except Paul Whiteman.[44] Unless one had access to tax figures, this was mere speculation. Another story reported that Bob's royalties on record sales alone exceeded three-quarters of a million dollars a year in the late forties. Betty Wills called such a figure ridiculous, though she wished it had been accurate. In more than thirty-two years of marriage she never

knew of a royalty check from any recording company for more than four thousand dollars. While Bob was making hundreds of thousands by the mid- and late forties, he made his big money not from recordings, but from dances.[45]

This "big money" was a source of both amazement and concern for the management of dance establishments where Wills performed. In the mid-forties *Variety* reported: "Western Bandmaster Bob Wills will not accept checks after playing dance dates and insists upon being paid off in greenbacks at the conclusion of the evening's play." That was the procedure employed at the ranch dances in West Texas where Bob began his career, and he demanded it even at the largest ballrooms on the West Coast. This amusing eccentricity became widely known. In the late forties, for instance, someone found a large amount of cash at a ballroom where Bob had recently performed and notified the Music Corporation of America. MCA could not imagine anyone else carrying such an amount of money and therefore wrote his road manager: "Did Bob Wills lose any monies on his engagement at Snyder as there was a package of money containing in the neighborhood of $34,000 found down there?" Though it was not Bob who had lost that money, the management at several places feared he might lose a similar amount and feared even more that he might be robbed. "Since the ork [orchestra] realizes phenomenal grosses with guarantees plus percentage, the take runs into thousands and Wills makes a practice of stuffing bills of small denomination into ordinary suitcases, when paid off, taking it right along with the boys and their instruments," *Variety* continued. "Efforts of friends to discourage the practice have been unsuccessful, so they have resorted to having the leader 'tailed,' without his knowledge, by several well-heeled gentlemen to 'reason' with anyone inclined to 'file' an unjust claim on the moola."[46]

Wills decided to invest some of his fortune in a ranch in the San Joaquin Valley a few miles from Fresno.[47] He bought eighty acres in the valley originally, and later on he bought some adjoining property. The family moved there in June, 1945. The place was irrigated, and the former owner had taken years to develop ten acres of it into a beautiful fruit orchard. Wills immediately had bulldozers clear the land of fruit trees and replaced them with seven stallions and forty mares.[48] He spent thousands of dollars to purchase these animals and thousands more to house, feed, and care for them. Betty's mother and father lived nearby. Her father, though semi-retired, needed something to keep him occupied, so Wills bought a dairy herd of Guernseys and put his father-in-law in charge of them. Harry Anderson babied his cows to the extent of weighing to the ounce the food for their formulas. At milking time one afternoon Bob's "wild mares" were in a lot adjoining the dairy herd, and Anderson, not knowing Wills was behind the barn, cursed the horses and wondered



Marquee on the West Coast, 1944. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

Bob Wills, 1945. *(Courtesy Johnnie Lee Wills)*

Rehearsal before a Columbia recording session, 1945. *Left to right:* Bob Wills, unidentified guitarist, Arthur E. Satherley, Tommy Duncan, Joe Holley (fiddle), unidentified guitarist. *(Courtesy Joe Holley)*

Some of Bob Wills's Texas Playboys with jazz greats at the Down Beat Room in Chicago, December 21, 1944. *Left to right:* J. C. Higginbotham, Henry "Red" Allen, Rip Ramsey, Ben Webster, Joe Holley, Teddy Adams, Bill "Nose" Thompson. *(Courtesy Rip Ramsey)*

People crowd the bandstand at a Bob Wills dance, mid-1940s. *Left to right:* unidentified fiddler, Joe Holley, Bob Wills, Tommy Duncan. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

Bob Wills, mid-1940s. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

"Uncle John" Wills playing a breakdown on the 1944 MCA tour in Chicago. *Left to right:* Noel Boggs (steel guitar), Rip Ramsey (bass), Monte Mountjoy (drums), Teddy Adams (bass), Jimmy Wyble (guitar), Millard Kelso (piano), Cameron Hill (guitar), John Wills (fiddle). *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

The Bob Wills fiddle ensemble, mid-1940s. *Left to right:* Louis Tierney, Bob Wills, Joe Holley. *(Courtesy Joe Holley)*

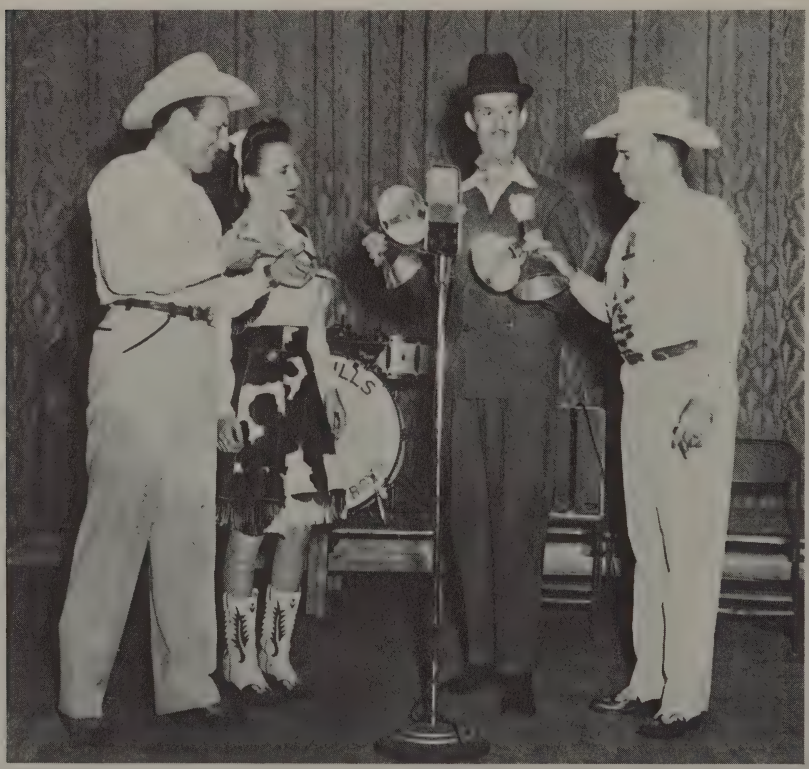
Bob with his son, James Robert Wills II, in 1946. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

Made at Wills's Fresno ranch in 1947. *Kneeling, left to right:* Ocie Stockard, Junior Barnard, Tommy Duncan, Millard Kelso, unidentified man; *standing:* Bob Wills, Billy Jack Wills, Herb Remington, Tiny Moore, Luke Wills, Joe Holley, Eldon Shamblin. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

Relatives of Bob Wills and the Playboys join them for Thanksgiving in Tulsa during a national tour in 1946. *Kneeling, left to right:* Ollie Simerley, Billy Jack Wills, Irene Wills, Johnnie Lee Wills holding Millie Ann Wills, Bob Wills, Emma Wills, John Wills, Lorene Wills, Shirl Ann Kerr, Alga Wills Kerr holding Junie Kerr, Eloise Wills House, Ruby Wills Sullivan, two unidentified children; *standing:* Tommy Duncan, unidentified bus driver, Tiny Moore, Eldon Shamblin holding child, Kathryn Shamblin, Evelyn McKinney, Ocie Stockard, Irene Stockard, Lerlene House, unidentified woman and man. *(Courtesy Eloise Wills House)*

Bob Wills and Punkin at Bob's Triple B Ranch near Fresno, 1947. *(Photo by Tallant; courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

On tour for MCA in 1947. *Left to right:* unidentified man, Dean McKinney, Slim Andrews, Bob Wills. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*



out loud "why in the hell anyone would keep such worthless things anyway." Bob slipped into the house and jokingly told Betty what had happened. He added, "Don't you tell your dad I heard him," then got busy building some corrals separate from the dairy barn.[49]

Bob invited the whole band to the ranch to help build barns and fences for his horses, and at various times for several weeks they all pitched in. Tommy Duncan, who loved anything pertaining to horses, practically lived at the ranch. Bob built to last, using redwood. He constructed a special stall for his favorite stallion, Punkin. Wills was guest of honor and parade marshal for rodeos all over California,[50] and both he and Punkin were popular with rodeo fans. Wills loved the cowboy life and the western audiences at such events. He was probably happier while he lived on his Triple B Ranch at Fresno than at any other time after he left Tulsa. "Bob wanted to retire on that place," Betty reflected. "That's when he hated to go on the road. When he had that place he wanted to stay so bad. We had a lot of good times out there."[51]

One of these good times, though neither Betty nor Bob Wills thought of it as such then, involved the birth of their second child, on October 4, 1946. The fact that the doctor had charged $2,200 to deliver James Robert II had absolutely nothing to do with this set of events; Bob would have gladly paid twice that for a doctor's service. Bob had ordered a telephone several weeks before, but it had not been installed. There was no way he could contact a doctor, and since there was not enough time to get Betty to a hospital, Bob had to deliver their second child, and first daughter, himself. They named her Carolyn. A day or two later he got on the bus with the boys and announced, "Call me Dr. Bob Wills, please."[52]

Like most families, the Willses had their difficulties. Though the problem was much less severe by the late 1940s, Bob still had attacks of jealousy and negative thinking. About a year after Betty and Bob moved to the Triple B, the young son of a band member drowned in an irrigation canal on the ranch. Bob was on a national tour, and Betty was so "emotionally tore up over the whole thing" that she did not sleep well for days. During that time, the man who looked after their livestock brought a baby colt to the house to show it to Betty. She was so upset she could not remember later whether he had brought a colt or a calf. "It didn't enter my mind to mention it [to Bob] in my letters or talking to him on the phone, because I was so involved." In the midst of her sorrow she was making burial arrangements for the boy. Shortly afterward, Bob returned from the tour. One morning when he and Betty went to the barns to look at the colts, the employee mentioned a particular colt. When Betty showed no sign she had ever seen it, he said, "Why, don't you remember when I brought the colt up to the house?" Betty noticed that "Bob kinda swelled up." They walked down into the field, and the hired man went on. Bob

then said, "You didn't say anything about that. It's funny you didn't mention it." Betty looked directly into Bob's eyes, her own dark eyes flashing and saying almost as much as her voice. "You know, it's a strange thing, but I had other things on my mind at that time!" Bob apologized and added, "You know, that was really a stupid thing [for me] to say."[53]

Bob's jealousy would continue to be a problem for many years. But even by 1947, with Betty's help, he had begun to overcome it, and as Betty observed, "It wasn't the unreasonableness it was in the beginning." The key was Betty's ability to talk this "unreasonableness" out with him, to wait it out. "I don't have a temper. I don't flare up, and when he would get mad over something, [I would wait] and let him sound off about it, and then explain the circumstances and point out where he was wrong about it and give him time to see what it was. Then he would come back and apologize. Bob always apologized when he was wrong. I didn't get mad about it, because I understood why he was that way."[54] Bob and Betty were too much in love to allow his jealousy to ruin their happiness. The longer they were married, the more this problem diminished.

Most of their unhappiness resulted from their having to be apart so much. Some of the national tours lasted three months, and by the time the tour reached the halfway point MCA had often booked Bob for another month or a four-month tour. Betty never forgot the "tearful departures" when Bob left the ranch. These absences were hard on Betty, but by 1946 she had James and Carolyn to care for, to occupy her time and keep her from being quite so lonesome. The sheer physical and mental strain of the tours was hard enough on Bob, but the pain of loneliness was most traumatic of all. The first two or three weeks on the road were the most difficult. "After that you had to harden yourself," Bob told Betty. "You knew you had to go on until it ended." After Bob had been gone about ten days, Betty began studying the schedule. "I knew between the second and third week he was going to call and say, 'When can you meet me?' I took James Robert with me. We would fly in and stay a few days. Five days was almost as long as I ever stayed. James and I did an awful lot of flying." Neither Betty nor any other band wife was allowed on the bus; she traveled with Bob in his automobile. Bob liked her to read detective stories to him as he drove along; as he became more and more involved in the story, his foot got heavier—and he got several speeding tickets.[55]

Nothing expressed Bob's homesickness, loneliness, and physical exhaustion like the letters he wrote his wife on these tours. "I sure will be glad when I can stay home some I sure am looking forward to the two weeks we have off. honey I do love you so much. . . . Kiss James for me," he wrote on December 16, 1945. Nearly a year later he wrote Betty from Austin, Texas:

> Darling I know you are blue but I cant believe you can possibly relize how blue I am I cant say much because the boys is just waiting for a chance to cry. . . . I just know little James is so sweet I sure would like to get a hold of him I would give anything to be with you and James Well sweet heart I havent said any thing but I do hope it isnt to silly I do love you so much in fact so much it scares me some time. . . .[56]

On the same tour, two weeks later, he sent the following letter from Perryton, Texas:

> I would give anything to be home with you it wont be much longer now I just wonder what you and little James are doing right now. . . . honey I love you so much and I am glad to for I have a wonderful home. . . . I hope you all ways love me it would kill me if you stopped but I know if you did you just couldent help it so I wouldnt blame you. . . . We like one nite here and then Amarillo and it want be long When we finish Clovis we will drive on without stopping I will bring Junior and Joe[57] with me and we three can just keep driving so you see how bad I want to get home. . . . Tell James I havent seen a boy on this whole trip that would hold him a candle to go by or even to start by. . . .
>
> Yours for every
> Bob[58]

After playing that one-night gig in Perryton in the Texas Panhandle, Bob and his Texas Playboys left a little after 1:00 A.M. for San Angelo, nearly 350 miles away. After a few hours' rest, they played another dance, from 9:00 P.M. until 1:00 A.M. Though Bob was physically exhausted, his letter, written that night before the dance in San Angelo, expressed his concern for Betty, not for himself. This was about six weeks before Carolyn was born. "Im so worryed about you honey I would give any thing to be with you Please take care of yourself," Bob wrote. "We sure are tired We have just drove 3 hundred and 47 miles We have to nite and 4 more to go and I start home after the last dance and we want stop until we get there. . . ." He concluded: "Honey how is James I sure do want to get hold of him and I can love you to death when I see you. . . ."[59]

Bob arrived home late in August, 1946, played several dates in California and on the West Coast in September, but was home to deliver his daughter, Carolyn, on October 4. As his family grew, it became even more difficult to leave the ranch to go on tour. Nevertheless, by at least November, Bob was back on the road. "How is my sweet little family fine I hope I would give any thing to be with you right now it is so lonsom honey I do love you so much," he wrote Betty from Amarillo. "I am so happy to think I have such a wonderful home and the sweetest wife in the world. . . . Kiss the Babies for me and have James to kiss you for me. All my Love Bob."[60]

The next spring Bob was on a tour that took him east of the Mississippi. Of the numerous letters he wrote Betty, the last one that has survived was written on June 16, 1947, at the Hotel Claridge in Memphis, Tennessee.

> I cant sleep Im so lonsome for you Gee I wish I was home.... We just dont get any rest We are on the move all the time I sure will be glad when it is over.... Our Babies will be groan be fore we know it Honey I am so tired I dont know how to act and lonsom for you I cant hardly stay a way from home if I was only with you right now I would sure be glad it would be Heaven to me.... Kiss our babies for me and make them kiss you for me
>
> by Doll
> Yours
> Bob[61]

These letters merely punctuate the fact that as Bob's family grew, his heart and mind were with them and not in his music. Because he hated to leave his ranch and family, his music became work, where it had once been fun. Some critics think his music and bands were never so good after he left Tulsa, and there is a good deal of truth in their observations, for the more Wills suffered on his tours, the more his music suffered. Between 1935 and 1941, when Bob was unhappy in marriage and in much of his private life, he gave himself to his music and used it to escape from his misery. Those were his most creative years. But by 1946, he had the woman he loved and the family he had always wanted. He wanted to give more of himself to his family and less to his musical career. By this time, he was using his family to escape from his music, from the exhaustion and the loneliness of being on the road that he had grown to dread.

After Bob Wills began making the national tours, his drinking problem became worse than at any other time in his career. If he drank, it was usually about halfway through the tour. Though fans and superficial acquaintances have generally exaggerated and oversimplified his drinking, Betty Wills never did. She believed that the physical and emotional strain and, especially, the loneliness of the tours were the principal causes of his drinking from the mid-1940s to the early 1950s. But she certainly did not believe these were the only explanations, since it was not necessarily when he was exhausted or depressed that he began drinking. "A lot of times, it was after a remark someone made after a dance," she explained. "If they were in the office and they were passing around the bottle, if someone would say, 'No, Bob doesn't want one,' Bob would say, 'Why doesn't Bob want one?' Then he would take it."[62] Rather than have someone else make his decisions for him, he took a drink, knowing he would probably end up drunk.

Unscrupulous men, as well as friends, learned what might trigger his drinking. Bob was absolutely honest in his business dealings, too honest at

times. If he was drinking during an engagement and did not show up, he cut the price of his contract.[63] But if he went to a job sober, as he nearly always did, and then got intoxicated, even after the dance at a party, he would give the management back part of what it had paid him. He was that ashamed of his drinking, that honest. Club managers and promoters, some of them stars of country-and-western music and so-called friends, would attempt to get Wills drunk at post-engagement parties so that he would return some of his earnings to them. Once Bob played at a big California ballroom, and the promoter, one of the top names in western swing, encouraged Bob to drink, knowing what the result would be. Later, when Bob offered to return part of the money the promoter had paid him, the promoter accepted, though the job had been completed and Bob's drinking had not affected it.[64]

"Some way Bob [believed], even when he was heavily intoxicated, that if I was there he wouldn't drink," Betty remarked. "He never took a drink at home, never wanted one. I never did see him take the first drink." Most of his drinking was on the road. If he was "playing out of home" and could come home every night or so, "he never did drink." Sometimes, however, he would be gone only a couple of days on a tour and would hit the bottle. Bob phoned Betty "every day of the world," and the boys in the band knew this. If they saw he had begun to drink, they would ask, "Have you called Betty today?" "They knew if he called he would ask me to come. So, therefore, a lot of times they finagled him into calling." Betty knew him so well she could tell he had begun drinking and wanted to quit. She caught the next flight out.[65]

There were a number of reasons the band members wanted Betty's help. Bob not only missed engagements when he was drinking, he sometimes gave his musicians and friends a great deal of trouble. On some occasions he wanted to scuffle and wrestle, and he often got rough. Once he nearly bit Jesse Ashlock's ear off. Another time, when he was in Hollywood making a movie, he got into a fight with one of the members of his organization. The pair struggled on the ground, and Wills got the fingers of his adversary in his mouth. With Wills hanging on like a bulldog, the pain was unbearable; the man jerked his hand out of Bob's mouth and loosened two of his front teeth—which had a sobering effect on Wills. The studio had to hold up Bob's part of the film a couple of days, until he found an expensive Hollywood dentist who repaired his teeth. On still another occasion Bob got drunk in Salt Lake City and lost his automobile. He hurriedly purchased another so that he could keep a booking several hundred miles away that night. Luther J. and the police finally found the lost auto, and Luke then caught Bob and the band farther along on the tour.[66]

Bob's drunken episodes, as traumatic as they could be for his musicians, were not without humor. For example, once when the band was en

route to an engagement in Farmington, New Mexico, Bob was traveling on the bus with the band. He got drunk and refused to put on any more clothing than just his underwear. The boys pulled the bus as near the door of Bob's motel room as they could possibly get it. They held up a bedsheet and a bedspread between the doors of the bus and the motel, then took their near-naked boss down the simulated tunnel into his room without any public exposure. Bob, of course, could not appear at the engagement, but his clarinetist, Jack Lloyd, and other band members insisted on dressing him before they put him back on the bus the next day. A few days earlier, when Bob had undressed, he had put his socks in his sharp-toed cowboy boots. Now, when Lloyd put the boots on Bob and plunged his toes against the socks, Bob hollered, "Socks! Socks!" as he picked up one foot and then the other and pointed at the toes of his boots. Lloyd did not get the message. Holding Bob up, he ushered him to the bus, Bob walking sort of bowlegged and wailing, "Socks! Socks!" Even after Bob lay down on the bus, he looked at Lloyd and said, "Socks! Socks!" Trying to calm the still-inebriated Wills, Jack said, "Now Bob, I put your socks on you. Everything is all right." Bob intermittently called out "Socks! Socks!" and pointed at his boots as the bus moved down the road. After Wills went through his complaint several times and Lloyd assured him a like number of times that his socks were on his feet, Jack, pulling Wills's boots off, said, "Bob, I'm going to take your boots off and show you that I put your socks on." Bob's face showed his relief as Lloyd pulled off his boots. Very confidently and somewhat condescendingly Jack said to his boss, "Now see, your socks are on." Bob calmly reached down, pulled a sock from the toe of each boot, and said, "Damn you, Jack, I told you socks were in my boots."[67]

When Bob decided he wanted to drink, the boys in the band found it almost impossible to keep him from getting alcohol. The veteran musicians ordinarily refused to get it for him because they knew the problems that resulted for both Bob and themselves. But Bob could often persuade new members to get him a drink. The bus once stopped in front of a bar, for instance, and Bob told a young guitarist to get him "three shots of anything you can get in a hurry. But if Luke or any other of the boys sees you, drink it yourself. Don't bring it to me."[68] Many a young musician no doubt found himself tipsy after downing three shots of hard liquor he did not especially desire. On another occasion Bob told another guitarist, who was new, but also reluctant to get him a drink, that his bridgework was hurting him and he only wanted a drink to "slosh around in my mouth." The guitarist brought the liquor. Bob got drunk, and the guitarist summarized the episode: "Ten days later Bob was still sloshing it around in his mouth."[69]

On those rare occasions when Bob decided to drink on the bandstand, the boys in the band found it quite difficult to shut off his source of alcohol. One time he had a friend put a half-pint of whiskey in the inside pocket of

his coat and run a tube from the bottle through the buttonhole on the lapel. That night the boys knew Wills was getting drunk, but for most of the evening they could not discover the source of his liquor. As instructed, the man came to the bandstand at intervals as if to request a song, and Bob would bend over near him as if taking his request. The steel guitarist finally discovered that Bob was siphoning the whiskey through the tube.[70]

One of the most serious incidents occurred during a drinking spree in Lubbock, Texas. After a dance there, Bob took some old friends to their home in Sudan, and they had several drinks. Bob, who was careful not to drive while drinking, hired a black man to do the driving. When they got back to Lubbock, Bob decided to buy some more liquor before his friend drove him on to his room. Liquor was not legally sold in Lubbock, but bootleggers were ubiquitous. Even had that not been the case, it would not have bothered Bob, for he had the uncanny ability of finding them at any hour, anywhere. On that occasion, it was probably 4:00 or 5:00 A.M. before they reached the bootlegger's place. They stayed there for some time, drinking and talking. It was nearly daylight when they started for Wills's motel. In downtown Lubbock a police car pulled up behind them and Bob's black friend got scared, stopped the auto in the middle of the street, and ran away down an alley. Bob evidently panicked. Instead of sitting there and pleading desertion, he slipped behind the wheel and drove the car to the curb. Another version has it that the police found Bob asleep and alone in the car with the motor running. In either case, the police arrested him for drunken driving. Bob hired a lawyer and was released almost immediately. Despite the fact that the lawyer cost him approximately a thousand dollars, Bob's bond was not properly handled, and he was arrested during an engagement at the Clover Club in Amarillo and taken to Lubbock to serve "three days in jail." The sheriff, an avid Bob Wills fan, had already warned him about shyster Lubbock lawyers. He put Bob in jail at five minutes until midnight one day, kept him all the next day, and released him at five minutes after midnight the next morning. Thus Wills served his three-day sentence in twenty-four hours and ten minutes.[71]

Betty's presence stopped these and similar antics. "After I got there, there was never any fuss or fight," she said. "When he would see me, that would be the end of it." He would not take another drink, though he "would be sick" for a few days. Betty appeared to have the same magical power over Bob that he had over his audiences. She often talked with him about his drinking, but she neither complained nor fussed with him about it. "Bob's drinking was never that type of problem with us, because I knew he hated it worse than anyone else. He was always so ashamed of it and so apologetic afterwards and really went out of his way to make amends for anything that he had said or done at that time. And you just couldn't say anything about it," Betty added thoughtfully. "There was really not that

much of it, not like people have blown it up to be. He would go for periods that he didn't drink for a long time." At times, it would be so long between those periods she would think, "Maybe this time it won't happen, and then blooey, it would."[72]

Betty loved her husband too much to ever allow his periodic drinking to ruin their marriage and home. She never was able to help him completely conquer this illness, but she understood and tried to help him handle it better. As in the case of his jealousy, the problem tended not to weaken but rather to strengthen the bonds between them.

A few years after Bob began making the tours, Betty suggested in one of their nightly telephone conversations that she meet him toward the end of the tour he was then on and drive home with him. Bob loved the idea. Betty flew to Albuquerque, arriving about 8:00 P.M. Bob played only one hour of a dance in Roswell and drove on to meet her in Albuquerque. Since he and the Playboys were booked for a few more engagements, it took nearly a week to reach Fresno. This helped Bob's drinking problem, which was often worse at the end of a tour, when he so wanted to get home. It was especially bad if his agent booked two or three extra engagements at the end of the tour and kept him from returning when he had originally planned. After their first trip home together from Albuquerque, Betty met Bob on nearly every tour and drove back with him. Betty's presence those last few days helped, but it certainly did not take all the trauma out of being on the road for weeks.

Bob disliked the tours and being away from his family so much that he thought of retiring while they lived on the Triple B. "He thought seriously of retiring then, but every time he reached the point that he was about ready to say, 'I'm going to quit,' somebody would call with one of those big show tours . . . or [Bob] would make a picture or record or something." He had so many irons in the fire that he missed his chance. Bob and Betty had their ranch; they had enough money for retirement. "That was his happiest period," Betty said, "when he was there . . . on that ranch."[73] Poor investments and unfortunate circumstances later made it impossible for Bob to ever really retire.

During the first few months the family was at Fresno, Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys began making radio transcriptions in Oakland, for Tiffany Music, Incorporated. The transcriptions were sold to radio stations across the nation, and the local stations sold their own advertising. These programs began with the "Playboy Theme," the old Light Crust Doughboy theme with "Texas Playboys from the Lone Star State" substituted for "Light Crust Doughboys from the Burrus Mill."[74] The series consisted of sixteen-inch transcriptions which included more than 220 selections. No single list reveals the incredible breadth of Wills's music and versatility of his band better than the Tiffany discography. The bands he

for THE FIRST TIME... TRANSCRIBED... ALL THE CHOICE *BOB WILLS* FAVORITES... MUSIC THAT MADE THE TEXAS PLAYBOYS THE NATION'S TOP WESTERN MUSICAL OUTFIT

A Sure-Fire Audience Builder for Your Station

A Powerful Selling-Vehicle for Your Sponsors

TIFFANY MUSIC, INC.
BOB WILLS TRANSCRIPTIONS
FOX-OAKLAND THEATRE BLDG.
OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

A promotional flyer for the Tiffany transcriptions. *(Courtesy Glenn P. White)*

Medicine Men

Proven Popular Appeal

Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys keep dance engagements almost nightly throughout the west to more than 10,000 persons every week. They hold dance attendance records at Jantzen Beach, Portland; Santa Monica, California, and in the Oakland Auditorium, where they drew 19,000 people in two nights.

Bob Wills has made from three to four western movies a year. He is a top Columbia Recording Company artist. To date, Columbia has pressed 15,000,000 records of Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys. BUT, since Columbia releases only two tunes annually, ONLY on this new transcription series can you get the entire Bob Wills repertory which shot this western band to stardom.

From **Time Magazine** (Feb. 11, 1946): "Bob Wills' music is called 'folk' in the trade for want of a better name; there's a lot of fig in the folk. Wills is more a backwoods Guy Lombardo than a balladeer like Burl Ives. His trick is to bring ranch-house music nearer to the city. Says he: 'Please don't confuse us with none of them hillbilly outfits'."

Bob Wills transcriptions are a sure cure for that dangerous listener malady—**dial fidgets.**

There's a bushel of sales for you in a bin of Bob Wills transcriptions.

Bob Wills ***Transcriptions provi***

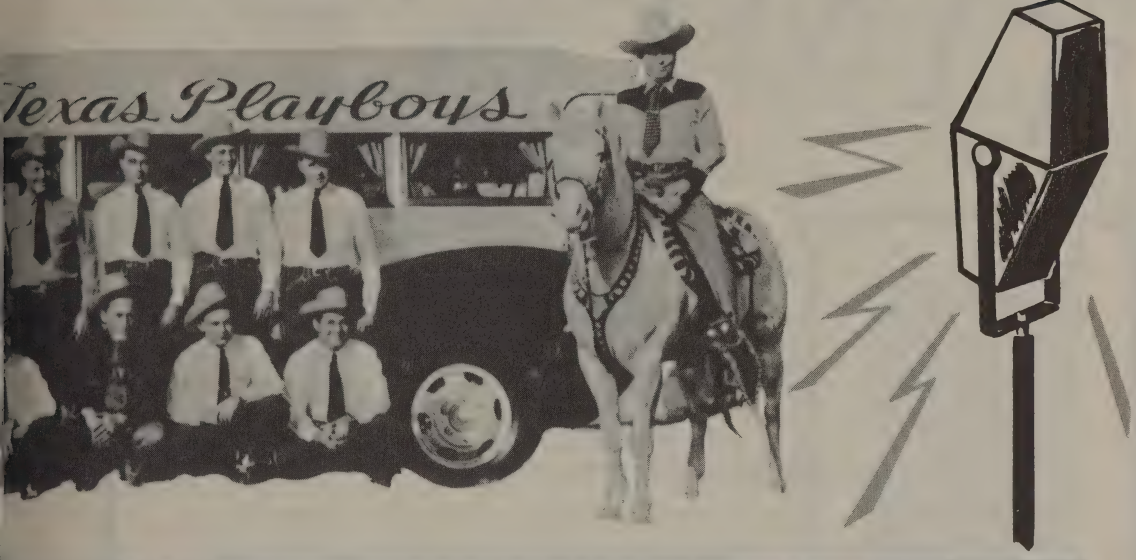
chosen American Range favorites on separa

SMASH **HALF HOUR**
SIX
26 WEEKS.

For your hard-to-crac
15-minute participat
those dubious re

There's a Bushel of S

CURE LISTENER'S DIAL-FIDGETS



the Mountain, Valley, and other

cks with continuity service for

ICIPATING PROGRAMS
ES WEEKLY
WEEKS...104 WEEKS

accounts . . . announcements or
. for your station rep in signing
and national spot campaigns.

a Bin of Bob Wills Transcriptions

Tested SELLING POWER

On Tulsa's KVOO in person, during two prewar years, the Texas Playboys sold Playboy Flour in Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma and Kansas, in amounts equalling brands on the market for 40 years. (Sponsor: Red Star Division—General Mills.)

. . . While Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys were transcribing their compelling songs and melodies between dance engagements, selling power of these transcriptions was being tested on California's non-network, KLX, Oakland. A few of the selling successes—

Pocket-type adding machines	**10,086 in 10 months**
Candid cameras	**5,000 in 4 months**
Plastic Easter bunnies	**4,000 in 2 months**
Bob Wills picture give-aways	**11,265 in 18 days**

Time Magazine quotes Bob Wills:

"They say that guy made $340,000 last year and don't know what he's doin'. Hell, I know what I'm doin' all right—I'm just playin' the kind of music my kind of folks like to hear."

or Wire BOB WILLS TRANSCRIPTIONS

TIFFANY MUSIC, INC.
FOX-OAKLAND THEATRE BLDG.
OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

TIME

THE WEEKLY NEWSMAGAZINE

BOB WILLS

Strictly by Ear

A cold California fog hung over San Joaquin Valley. Inside Beardsley's dance hall, near Bakersfield, the air was steaming with the exertions of 1,358 oil workers and farmers as they jived, jumped, or just jogged to the music. The men were mostly tieless; the fruit-cannery girls they danced with were mostly in sweaters and slacks. On the platform, Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys tapped their pointed, hand-stitched boots, and plunked and blew their way through *Take Me Back to Tulsa*. On benches lining the walls, babies in blankets slept through it all.

The Bakersfield dance last week was something special: Bob Wills was celebrating his 30th anniversary as a cowboy fiddler. For the occasion, he played his 35th new tune, a fox trot called *G.I. Wish* ("G.I. . . . I wish that I were free to roam, G.I. wish that I were home"). It had the same kind of whine, the same kind of maudlin lyrics that put his *Stars and Stripes on Iwo Jima* and *Smoke on the Water* among the nation's top-selling folk records last year.

Backwoods Lombardo. Bob Wills's music is called "folk" in the trade for want of a better name; there's a lot of fig in the folk. Wills is more a backwoods Guy Lombardo than a balladeer like Burl Ives. His trick is to bring ranch-house music nearer to the city. Says he: "Please don't anybody confuse us with none of them hillbilly outfits."

Swart, handsome Jim Rob ("Bob") Wills, 40, son of a Texas sharecropping fiddler, has fiddled since he was ten. At 17 he preached the gospel at rural revival meetings, then joined a gang of promising Texas badmen, two of whom were eventually sentenced to life terms. (One of his record best-sellers is *The Convict and the Rose.*) Wills and a group of pick-up musicians, calling themselves the "Lightcrust Doughboys," played on W. Lee (*Pass the Biscuits, Pappy*) O'Daniel's radio show. Wills set to music O'Daniel's *Beautiful Texas* and *Your Own Sweet Darling Wife*, with which O'Daniel sang his way into the Texas Governorship and the U.S. Senate.

Soon after splitting with Pappy, Wills took his boys to Tulsa, where they adopted their present name, the "Texas Playboys." He had just hit the big time, with film and recording contracts, when he enlisted in 1942. When he got out of the Army a year later, he moved to the San Joaquin Valley.

No Notes, No Showoffs. His bandmen, most of whom cannot read music, play strictly by ear. Bob explains: "People don't like to see no musician with his nose buried in a sheet of music when they're dancin'." The Playboys were picked for their "mixin' quality." Says Bob: "I can't stand for no showoffs." What showoffin' there is, Bob does himself.

He is tired of being patronized by the swing kings. Says Bob: "They say, 'That guy made $340,000 last year and don't know what he's doin'.' Heil. I know what I'm doin' all right—I'm just playin' the kind of music my kind of folks like to hear."

EXCLUSIVE IN YOUR MARKET AREA!

A low-cost program investment in America's number one western swing band is a cinch to pay off!

FOR AUDITION PROGRAM

($5.00 Deposit Refundable)

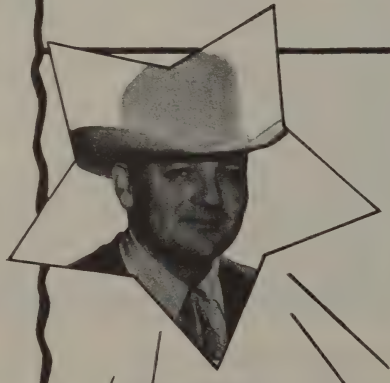
WIRE:

TIFFANY MUSIC, INC.

BOB WILLS TRANSCRIPTIONS

FOX-OAKLAND THEATRE BLDG.

OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA



TOMMY DUNCAN
Ballads

McKINNEY SISTERS
Harmony

used for these recordings were probably the best he had after he left Tulsa. Among the many musicians who participated in the Tiffany sessions were himself, Joe Holley, and Louis Tierney, violins; Luke Wills, bass; Billy Jack Wills and Johnnie Cuviello, drums; Eldon Shamblin and Junior Barnard, electric guitars; Noel Boggs, Herb Remington, and Roy Honeycutt, steel guitars; Tiny Moore, electric mandolin and violin; Millard Kelso, piano; Alex Brashear, trumpet; Tommy Duncan, Evelyn and Dean McKinney, and Tommy "Spike" Doss on vocals.[75]

At the time Wills and the Playboys were cutting the Tiffany transcriptions, they went on a network radio show for the Fisher Flouring Mills, makers of an instant-cooking, whole wheat cereal called Zoom. Fisher also made Biskit Mix and Fisher's Pancake and Waffle Flour, but Wills's principal task was to sell Zoom. The broadcast originated in Los Angeles at station KGO and was heard over the ABC Pacific Network. The announcer for the Zoom shows was Jack Webb, who later gained great fame and greater fortune as the star of the television show "Dragnet" and as a producer. The Bob Wills show lasted only a few months. No one ever knew whether it failed because of the show itself or because, as Wills said, "No one could eat that cereal." It probably failed, as so many of his interests did, because he was on the road and away from the show too much of the time.[76]

Bob Wills continued to play all over California but tried to stay as near Fresno as possible. He was trying to build another circuit like he had in Oklahoma, and he thought he could have, had he had the money to stay long enough to get it established. It had taken him years to build what he had in Tulsa. "You get the people to come and hear you a couple of times," Wills often said. "Then they leave you, and you win them back, and they're your customers forever." The problem was that he never could hold out long enough. As Betty explained it, "He had to hit the road. People were hollering for him in Texas, Oklahoma, and across the country. MCA got him big guarantees."[77] The lure was too great: in both 1946 and 1947, Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys made a number of national tours.

On September 4, 1946, Wills began a recording session in Hollywood. This was only the third time since his session with the Fort Worth Doughboys in 1932 that he recorded without horns. Not that Wills wanted it that way—he simply was unable to find horn musicians who fit. Moreover, Columbia and his agent, as well as the management at some dance establishments, were encouraging him to go to an all-string band.[78] Still, the repertory in that session was much broader than in the session the year before. It included fiddle music, such as "Cotton Eyed Joe"; blues, "Brain Cloudy Blues"; popular songs, "Virginia"; and guitar instrumentals, "Punkin Stomp" and "Bob Wills Boogie." On October 15–16, 1947, Wills made his last records for Columbia, in Chicago. Again, no horns were

used. Several hits came out of that session: "A Sweet Kind of Love," "Texarkana Baby," "New Texas Playboy Rag," and "Deep Water."[79] Of all his Columbia material, the music in this session, while it lacked the versatility characteristic of his Tulsa bands, best typified "Bob Wills music."[80] It was distinctively western and bore his stamp.

Wills's association with Columbia can be traced back to his November, 1929, recordings for the Brunswick Record Corporation (later bought by CBS). In the eighteen years up through his last Columbia session, Wills and his Texas Playboys recorded some 250 selections, and the relationship with Columbia had always been both cordial and lucrative. He left that firm only because one of his managers—a friend, Wills thought—told Wills he could get him a $25,000 bonus if he left to record for another company. There were other promises, but as it turned out, Wills got nothing, while the manager got $7,000 from the change.[81] Wills admitted he had gotten bad advice: "This was another mistake I made."[82]

Fourteen days after the final Columbia session, Wills and his Texas Playboys had their first session for MGM, October 30–31, 1947, the first of two MGM sessions in less than a month. Between October 30 and November 12 the band cut twenty-six sides. The repertory was much broader than in the final session for Columbia. It was heavy on blues: "Blackout Blues," "Blues for Dixie," "Cotton Patch Blues," "Dog House Blues," and "Silver Lake Blues." "Silver Lake Blues" was recorded as an instrumental with a fiddle lead, as was the fiddle tune "Sally Goodin." In "Papa's Jumpin'," "Playboy Chimes," and "Hop, Skip and Jump over Texas," Wills featured electrified guitars and mandolin. For the first time since he began using drums in 1935, Wills featured them, in "Texas Drummer Boy." One of the biggest hits from those first MGM sessions, "Bubbles in My Beer," provides a good example of how a song with sad lyrics could be given a happy quality by the Wills dixieland beat, a lilting rhythm, and Tommy Duncan's vocalizing, so that it became almost a satire of a man looking at the bubbles in his beer and thinking of his wasted past.[83]

By 1947 it was obvious to Bob and Betty that they were not going to establish another Tulsa in the San Joaquin Valley of California. Bob therefore decided to purchase the old Aragon Ballroom near Sacramento, and very reluctantly, the Wills family moved out of the valley. It was a sad day when they left the Triple B Ranch, but they hoped Sacramento would be the place they could settle down and spend more time together as a family. They still owned the Triple B and hoped they could retire there eventually.[84]

Bob changed the name of the Aragon to Wills Point. In addition to the ballroom, Wills Point included a large swimming pool, an amusement park, and some apartments, where several of the band members and their families lived. Though Bob spent several thousand dollars improving the

property, began radio broadcasts over Sacramento's 50,000-watt KFBK, and promoted the place in many ways, it still would not support the kind of operation he wished to build.[85] The principal—and ironic—reason was that he was gone so much of the time on national tours or playing somewhere else on the West Coast.[86] He had little choice. He was actually making more money than he had ever made in his life, but to do this, to keep Wills Point operating, he had to stay on the road.

Another factor was the only real enemy Wills ever had, alcohol. In the late forties he began to drink to the extent that many times he was unable to appear at his dances.[87] Loyal fans began to wonder if they would get to see and hear Wills if they bought a ticket; even they murmured if he did not appear. He developed a reputation of getting drunk and not meeting his commitments that followed him the rest of his career. While this aspect of his career was misunderstood and exaggerated, it was also true that his drinking in that period was excessive. He even appeared intoxicated before the public on some few occasions. So drunk was he, and having such a good time, that he had some of his band members do a jig or other silly things, rather than sing or take a chorus, and Wills himself played the saxophone.[88]

Such antics could have been passed off as a "good time" if they had ended there. They did not. Wills often stayed drunk several days, and it sometimes took from one to two weeks, and occasionally longer, for him to get over the sickness that accompanied his drinking. He was deeply ashamed of his drunkeness and generally stayed in a hotel or motel where no one could see him until he was completely sober. He kept no alcohol in his home; nor would he allow it to be served there by anyone else. His children never saw him while he was drinking or even knew about his drinking problem until they were nearly grown.[89] Musicians who were close to him spoke of how pathetic it was to see him getting over one of these drunks. For several days he would say little or nothing, or would be unconscious or asleep. Then one day they would go into his room, and he would rise up and look at them, asking pitifully, "What is today?" By his expression and the way he asked, they knew he was wondering how many important engagements he had missed and how much it had cost him and the band. He might go for weeks or months before this occurred again. But the damage was done; he had disappointed fans, management, and his band.[90]

The amazing thing is that Wills could get bookings in the late forties and early fifties, when his drinking was at its worst. Other artists—Bessie Smith, Wills's favorite, to name just one—could never make a similar comeback. Fortunately, his drinking was periodic and therefore not as damaging to his career as it would have been had he drunk every day. Even in this period, he was known to have gone on a seventy-day tour and not

once touched any alcohol.[91] His drinking was never so bad as some of his fans thought it was, but it was serious enough to be his greatest professional handicap.

Fans still came to Bob's dances by the thousands. They were elated when he began to overcome the problem, and they continued to support him whenever he came within driving distance. The loyalty, effort, and ability of Eldon Shamblin, Tommy Duncan, and other Playboys kept the band going in those traumatic times when Wills could not appear. Shamblin handled a great deal of Wills's business in those years. "When Bob didn't show up, I had to face both the promoters and the crowd. Of course if affected business. People would come to the bandstand and say, 'Is old Bob going to be here tonight?' If he didn't, they would gripe, but nine times out of ten they stayed." Shamblin said the remarkable thing was that Wills's drinking did not affect business any more than it did.[92] Nevertheless, by the summer and fall of 1948, Bob's drinking had brought his band to the most critical time in its history.

In September, 1948, while the Playboys were based at Wills Point, Tommy Duncan left to organize his own band.[93] Outside of the breakup of the original Texas Playboys during the war, this was the most severe blow yet to Wills's career. Since 1932, Duncan had been Wills's vocalist and a key member of his band. He was with Wills during the early years of the Light Crust Doughboys, before the Texas Playboys ever existed. When W. Lee O'Daniel fired Bob, in August, 1933, Tommy Duncan refused to stay with O'Daniel and the security of a steady income; he chose to go with Wills, though he knew that Wills himself was out of money and out of a job. Tommy had said to Bob, "Where do we go from here? . . . You hired me, O'Daniel didn't. And I'm not leavin' you until you do fire me. Anywhere you go I'm goin'."[94] Fifteen years, almost to the day, had gone by since those words were spoken. Both men must have thought of them as they finally parted. They had seen some lean years and hard times since 1933. To get to where they were in 1948, they had gone hungry and had been poorly clad and had driven thousands of miles in old cars and buses that were not only uncertain, but dangerous. Even worse, they had been made fun of as "hillbillies" by other musicians, who pointed out their "musical ignorance." On the other hand, since 1933 they had pioneered a new music, recorded more than three hundred selections, made many movies, and broken attendance records; they were regarded as the best in the field of western music. When they parted, they were riding the crest. They were hardly "hubbin' it" at that time. As happens so often, adversity, hard times, and sacrifice had kept them together, and success and plenty helped drive them apart. It would be difficult for fans to think of Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys without Tommy Duncan. Except briefly during the war, there had never been a Texas Playboy band without him. He and Bob were the only original Playboys left in the band.

There were a number of reasons for Duncan's leaving. He wanted his own band.[95] There were personality conflicts, and Duncan was tired of having to assume the responsibility of fronting the band when Wills could not make appearances because of his drinking. He had to handle most of the fans' complaints on these occasions. Tommy's protests added to the strained relations between him and his boss. While the band was based at Sacramento, "tensions built" between them.[96] One night before their dance was to begin, Tommy asked in a loud and disgusted tone, "Wonder if he will be here tonight?" Wills had just come through the rear entrance onto the bandstand and passed Duncan just as he made these remarks. Wills murmured, half to Tommy and half to the band, "Hell yes, he's here! What did you expect?" Later that night he told Eldon Shamblin, who was acting as manager, to fire Tommy. Shamblin, who had been in the band since 1936, longer than any other member except Duncan, acknowledged that this was one of the hardest things he ever had to do. Duncan had held true to his promise of 1933: he did not leave Wills until Wills fired him. Eldon said Tommy knew it was coming and wanted to go on his own anyway.[97]

Duncan had been with Wills long enough to have become a famous figure in western music. He had a following of thousands of fans, and he wanted to cash in on his own popularity by forming his own band. Unfortunately for Wills, other key musicians left the band shortly after Duncan was fired. Bob had missed several engagements in the summer and fall of 1948, and whenever he failed to appear, the contract was cut by several hundred or several thousand dollars, sometimes to just union scale. Bob paid far above scale and the musicians received a flat salary of so much per week; they were always paid that sum, whether Wills showed up or not. Nevertheless, when he missed jobs, it affected the economics of the whole organization. MCA booked the band for a national tour that fall, and Bob impressed on the boys the financial significance of it both for himself and for them. According to one account, when Wills got drunk and missed the first engagement of the tour, Joe Holley, Millard Kelso, and Ocie Stockard made their decision to leave the band. Duncan's firing may have given them occasion to do what they had thought of doing for some time. Wills's drinking was causing problems for himself and his musicians, and they, like many fans, were tired of it.[98]

It was a sad occasion the night Wills and Duncan played their last dance together, especially when Tommy sang his last song with the Texas Playboys. Aside from the sentiment naturally involved when two men split up who had played together for more than sixteen years, it was also a sad omen for the subsequent career of each man.

In late October, 1948, with himself, Holley, Kelso, and Stockard as a nucleus, Duncan added a few more musicians and formed a group called Tommy Duncan and his Western All Stars.[99] One musician said it was

exactly that—all stars—and was one of the best western swing bands ever organized.[100] With Tommy's fame and ability, the group had no difficulty getting good bookings and recording contracts.[101] His band, however, was short lived; it lasted a little over two years, from October, 1948, until late 1950 or early 1951.[102] Though Tommy Duncan remained one of the leading singers in western swing for nearly twenty years, he never could sing so successfully as he had with Wills.

Wills, for his part, never found a vocalist who even came close to suiting his music the way Duncan did. Tommy's style had that "ripple of happiness that fit the band."[103] Wills hired many good vocalists to take Duncan's job—but no one ever took Duncan's place.[104] Fans wondered if Wills could go on without him, and for good reason. By the fall of 1948, Wills did not have a single member of the original Texas Playboys in the band. Only one man, Eldon Shamblin, had been in his band before the war.

Nevertheless, Bob still had what he started with in 1915, his fiddle and his music. That was enough. He not only went on without Duncan, he continued to be very successful.[105] Some of the musicians he hired during the next decade and a half were young; some lacked much experience. Yet again and again he built them into bands worthy of the Bob Wills reputation.

In May, 1949, Wills took his Texas Playboys to Hollywood for a recording session for MGM, his first without Tommy Duncan. Jack Loyd did the vocals. Ironically, one of the first selections they recorded was the old jazz favorite, "I Ain't Got Nobody," that Tommy Duncan sang for Wills when Wills hired him as a Light Crust Doughboy in 1932. Perhaps this particular recording was meant to show Duncan and Wills's own fans that someone else could sing Tommy's songs. Loyd tried to copy Tommy's 1935 recording of the song exactly. If Wills was trying to convince himself and the fans that he had been wise in firing Duncan, he failed. Loyd could sing well; but it was evident after this recording session, and more evident after sessions during the next decade, that neither Loyd nor anyone else could sing for Bob Wills as successfully as Tommy Duncan had. Similarly, Duncan's recordings with his All Stars revealed that he could never sing with the same spirit or spark he had with Wills. Wills and Duncan needed each other—a fact they both fortunately came to realize a decade later.

Despite Duncan's absence, however, the records from the May, 1949, session were successful. "I Ain't Got Nobody," "The Warm Red Wine," and "I Married the Rose of San Antone," for example, sold very well. Because folk dancing was popular at the time, Wills recorded four fiddle tunes especially for square dancing. He used ten musicians in these sessions. He and Johnny Gimble played violins; Herb Remington, steel guitar; Eldon Shamblin, electric guitar; Tiny Moore, electric mandolin

and violin; Alex Brashear, trumpet; Doc Lewis, piano; Luke Wills, bass; Billy Jack Wills, drums; and Johnny Gimble, electric mandolin. Jack Loyd provided vocals.

In January, 1950, Wills had a session in Oklahoma and in April, another in Hollywood. (While he was in Hollywood, he also made a movie for MGM.)[106] Between the two, he cut fourteen sides. Still hoping to find another Tommy Duncan, Wills used seven vocalists in the recording sessions. He had three violins but no horns. The most conspicuous success those sessions produced was an old fiddle tune composed by Bob and his father for which Billy Jack Wills wrote a delightful set of lyrics: "Faded Love" became a hit within a few weeks and, eventually, an all-time Wills favorite.[107]

1. Bob Wills; Betty Wills.
2. Woodie Wood; Smokey Dacus; Danny Alguire; Leon McAuliffe; Bob Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; Wayne Johnson.
3. Eldon Shamblin.
4. Bob Wills; Betty Wills.
5. Rip Ramsey. Buddy Ray was in that band and recalled that including Wills there were four fiddlers; two of the others were Louis Tierney and Buddy Ray. Paul Stanbaugh played piano; Alex Brashear, trumpet; Dick Hamilton, guitar; Tiny Mott, tenor saxophone; Monte Mountjoy, drums; Cameron Hill, guitar; and Jimmy Wyble, guitar (Buddy Ray to Glenn P. White, June 4, 1968; White to me, Nov. 17, 1971).
6. Betty Wills.
7. Bob Wills.
8. Rip Ramsey. See also Glenn P. White to me, Nov. 17, 1971.
9. Rip Ramsey. Laura Lee Owens said these musicians expressed similar sentiments to her.
10. Ibid. Noel Boggs identified three reasons Wills broke up the big band: "Bob thought they were making fun of him and he would not stand for this. Also, there was a lot of customer critics, who liked the strings. They said this Big Band just wasn't Bob Wills and transportation was also a big problem in war time" (Boggs to Glenn P. White, May 9, 1968). Listen especially to Alex Brashear.
11. To appreciate this change, which is not only obvious, but almost abrupt, one must listen to many of Wills's prewar and postwar recordings, for example, from the sessions of July 14–16, 1942, and January 24 and 28, 1945.
12. When Merle Haggard remarked during our interview that people overlooked the dixieland in Wills's music, he obviously had in mind dixieland as a style, rather than traditional dixieland music. Bob Wills told me the same thing about his "dixieland style." Listen also to Merle Haggard (Bill Ward interview).
13. Laura Lee Owens, who married Hill after she joined the band in the mid-1940s, said Wills's guitarists attempted to use strings to match the sound and style of the swing bands. She heard Hill and Wyble discuss how much they admired Charlie Christian. Also Eldon Shamblin; Sleepy Johnson; Leon Rausch; Leon McAuliffe; Bob Wills. Listen particularly to the recordings Wills made for Columbia and MGM in the late 1940s and early 1950s and the Tiffany transcriptions.
14. Eldon Shamblin; Johnny Gimble; Keith Coleman; Laura Lee Owens; Leon McAuliffe; Bob Wills; Betty Wills; Tiny Moore.
15. Eldon Shamblin.
16. Betty Wills.
17. Ibid.

18. Rip Ramsey; Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook.

19. Betty Wills.

20. See the advertisement for his appearance at the St. Charles Theatre in Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook. Also Rip Ramsey; Bob Wills; Betty Wills; Speedy West to Glenn P. White, Jan. 15, 1968.

21. In Birmingham the show drew more than 4,000 for one performance (Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook).

22. Betty Wills; Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook; Mrs. Leroy Cunningham to me, May 14, 1975.

23. Rip Ramsey; Joe Holley; Alex Brashear.

24. Listen to *Firehouse Five Story, Vol. 3,* Goodtime Jazz L-12012; Alex Brashear.

25. Listen especially to Keith Coleman; Johnny Gimble. For a brief account of Wyble's career in jazz music, see Leonard Feather, *The New Edition of the Encyclopedia of Jazz* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1960), p. 470.

26. Johnny Gimble. Also Keith Coleman; Woodie Wood; Alex Brashear; Wayne Johnson; Jesse Ashlock; Bob Wills; Jamie McIntosh; Danny Alguire; Neil Duer.

27. See John McEuen's liner notes to *Hall of Fame: Bob Wills and Tommy Duncan,* United Artists UAS-9962. See also Bill C. Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.: A Fifty-Year History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), p. 181.

28. Glenn P. White provided me with tapes of Wills's radio shows and dances for this period, as did Bob and Betty Wills.

29. The trade journals no doubt took their lead from the record companies, which for some time had been classifying hillbilly and western music together.

30. Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook.

31. Betty Wills.

32. See Columbia Records' artist's cards for Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys, 1935–47; Arthur E. Satherley to me, Feb. 4, 1973.

33. " 'The Bob Wills' Fiddle Tickles the B.O.," *Billboard,* Jan. 20, 1945, p. 4.

34. Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook; Rip Ramsey; Eldon Shamblin; Alex Brashear; Joe Holley; Laura Lee Owens.

35. "Bob Wills Plays Here Monday," *Wilmington* (Calif.) *Journal,* Mar. 30, 1945. See also *Wilmington Press,* Mar. 30, 1945.

36. My own observations at Bob's dances were confirmed by interviews with Wills and his musicians. Listen especially to Jim Keck; Tommy Louis Hancock; Billy Jo Hancock; Winston Dennis; Don Dennis; Edd Townsend; James B. Bowman.

37. Rip Ramsey.

38. See the Music Corporation of America's advertisement on their client Bob Wills in *Variety,* May 31, 1944, p. 56. Erskine Johnson reported in "Fiddler Is Music Phenomenon," *Daily News* (Los Angeles), Apr. 26, 1944, that Wills packed 19,000 into the Oakland Civic Auditorium for one dance. See also " 'Bob Wills' Fiddle Tickles the B.O.," front cover and p. 4; "Wills Licks Gives Hicks Kicks: Real Cowboy Music Wins Plaudits of Audience in Buckaroo Country," *Variety,* 17, no. 32 (n.d.), front-page story and picture.

39. Roger V. Devlin, column entitled "The Rambler" (undated), Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook. Wills and his Playboys broke Jan Garber's record of 2,100 at the Armory in Klamath Falls, Oregon, by attracting 2,514 dancers. Wills also had "a record-breaking stay at the Golden Gate Theatre in San Francisco" (ibid.).

40. "Bob Wills Plays Here Monday." See also *Wilmington Press,* Mar. 30, 1945.

41. Hedda Hopper, "Looking at Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times,* June 19, 1944.

42. "Strictly by Ear," *Time,* Feb. 11, 1946, p. 50. See also "Personality Parade," *Western Radio News,* June, 1946.

43. Articles and advertisements by the Music Corporation of America leave little doubt about this. Because they managed most of the big-name bands in the country, MCA would have known how successful Wills was. And they could not have afforded to offend their other clients by making untrue claims about Wills. See, e.g., the MCA advertisement cited in n. 38, above.

44. Erskine Johnson, e.g., in "Fiddler Is Music Phenomenon," argued that as early as 1936 Wills's income was the largest of any bandleader in the country except Whiteman.

45. Betty Wills. Although 1948 was certainly one of Wills's better years in record sales, a royalty earnings summary from the Columbia Recording Corporation among his papers showed his royalty check for the period ending December 31, 1948, to have been $3010.88.

46. *Daily Variety* (Hollywood), Apr. 25, 1944, p. 2; Norman Steppe (MCA) to Chip Essley, May 31, 1947; Betty Wills; Bob Wills; Eldon Shamblin. It had always been Bob's practice to pay his musicians in cash after each dance or engagement.

47. O. M. Shelton, "Browsing Around," *Fresno Bee,* Feb. 24, 1946.

48. Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook; Johnnie Lee Wills; Billy Jack Wills; Stuart Hamblen; Alex Brashear.

49. Betty Wills.

50. "Stage Set for Parade, Rodeo: Bob Wills to Ride," *Tulare* (Calif.) *Advance Register,* May 31, 1946. Wills was the star of the first rodeo Verne Elliot produced in Birmingham, Alabama (Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook). See also "Wills to Bring Horse Along with Band for Elks Rodeo," *Current-Argus* (Carlsbad, N.M.), May 31, 1949.

51. Betty Wills; Bob Wills. The Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook includes a wealth of material concerning their ranch as well as many pictures of their horses, band members, and family at the ranch.

52. Bob Wills; Betty Wills.

53. Betty Wills.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid.

56. Bob Wills to Betty Wills, Aug. 10, 1946.

57. I.e., Junior Barnard and Joe Holley.

58. Bob Wills to Betty Wills, Aug. 23, 1946.

59. Ibid., Aug. 24, 1946.

60. Ibid., Nov. 20, 1946.

61. Ibid., June 16, 1947.

62. Betty Wills.

63. Eldon Shamblin; Johnnie Lee Wills; Betty Wills; Sam Gibbs.

64. Ibid.; Smokey Dacus; Joe Andrews; Harry Peebles; Billy Jack Wills; Tiny Moore.

65. Betty Wills.

66. Luke Wills; Sam Gibbs; Howard Turner.

67. Jack Lloyd; Leon Rausch; Glenn Rhees; Gene Crownover; Luke Wills.

68. Gene Crownover; Sam Gibbs.

69. Leon Rausch.

70. Gene Crownover; Leon Rausch; Glenn Rhees; Johnnie Gimble; Sam Gibbs; Luke Wills.

71. Johnnie Lee Wills; Luther J. Wills; Billy Jack Wills; Sam Gibbs.

72. Betty Wills. Without exception, those who knew Bob intimately said he hated drinking. Listen to Edna Wills; Mary Lou Cloud; Mary Helen Brown, field notes; Johnnie Lee Wills; Eldon Shamblin; Sam Gibbs.

73. Betty Wills.

74. The "Playboy Theme" is now available on Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys, *For the Last Time,* United Artists UA-LA216-J2.

75. Since these transcriptions were made over a period of months, there were some personnel changes (see Bob Pinson's Discography for complete listings). This accounts for the listing of three steel guitarists and two drummers. However, members of that band told me that Wills often used two steel guitars. Interviews with Eldon Shamblin; Rip Ramsey; Luke Wills; Teddy Adams; Billy Jack Wills. See also Noel Boggs to Glenn P. White, Sept. 25, 1968.

76. Bob Wills; Betty Wills.

77. Ibid. See "Homecoming," *Tulsa Daily World,* Nov. 24, 1946, for a story on Wills's

return to Cain's Academy. See also "Bob Wills to Coliseum, Tuesday Night," ibid., Nov. 19, 1944.

78. Eldon Shamblin.

79. See Columbia Records' artist's cards for Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys, 1935–47; Martine McCarthy to me, Apr. 26, 1973.

80. Bob Wills.

81. Sam Gibbs, Wills's booking agent after the mid-1950s, gave me the details of this unfortunate affair. Gibbs learned about it from Wills and others. Also Betty Wills.

82. Bob Wills. During our interviews, Arthur Satherley said he and Columbia were very sorry that Wills got this bad advice and went with another recording company. Satherley felt it was a loss to both Wills and Columbia.

83. Billy Jack Wills; Leon McAuliffe.

84. Betty Wills.

85. Eldon Shamblin; Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook.

86. See, e.g., "Bob (Ahaaaa) Wills," *Hillbilly and Western Jamboree,* Aug., 1948, p. 5.

87. Field notes with Tommy Duncan and his fans and with Wills and his fans. Also Eldon Shamblin; Betty Wills.

88. Laura Lee Owens.

89. James Robert Wills II; Carolyn Wills Johnson; Diane Wills Arnold; Cindy Wills James; Betty Wills.

90. Eldon Shamblin; Joe Andrews; Glynn Duncan; Joe Andrews; Laura Lee Owens.

91. Joe Ferguson; Eldon Shamblin.

92. Eldon Shamblin.

93. Field notes with Tommy Duncan; Joe Holley; Jesse Ashlock; John W. Townsend.

94. Quoted in Ruth Sheldon, *Hubbin' It: The Life of Bob Wills* (Tulsa: Privately published, 1938), p. 112.

95. Tommy Duncan, field notes; Corine Andrews; Joe Andrews; Alex Brashear.

96. Eldon Shamblin; Corine Andrews. In interviews with me in 1949–50, Duncan mentioned the problem of drinking and his fronting the band, but he also emphasized that he wanted his own band. Listen especially to Glynn Duncan.

97. Eldon Shamblin.

98. Listen especially to Eldon Shamblin; Joe Holley; Alex Brashear; Betty Wills; Tommy Duncan. According to another account of this split in Wills's band, the musicians did not receive as much money when Wills did not appear, only union scale. Also Laura Lee Owens; Glynn Duncan.

99. "Split Oats," *Downbeat,* Nov. 17, 1948; Joe Holley; Glynn Duncan; Laura Lee Owens; Tommy Duncan; Betty Wills; Sam Gibbs.

100. Noel Boggs to Glenn P. White, May 24, 1968. Boggs played steel guitar in Duncan's band. See also Speedy West to White, June 16, 1968; Buddy Ray to White, June 16, 1968; "Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys," *Western Music,* Sept. 1, 1951, p. 7.

101. Sam Gibbs. Gibbs handled a good deal of booking for Duncan and his band.

102. Glynn Duncan.

103. Eldon Shamblin.

104. Leon McAuliffe. McAuliffe, who himself sang for Wills for years and made many recordings for him as a vocalist, made this point.

105. "Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys," pp. 16–17, e.g., called Wills and his band the undisputed top western organization in the nation.

106. "Playboys to Make Movies," *Daily Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City), Apr. 16, 1950. See also Jimmy Fiddler's column in the *Los Angeles Times,* Apr. 15, 1950. Universal-International wanted to feature Wills in a series of western musicals, but nothing materialized.

107. "Faded Love" was in number one position in the country-and-western ratings by the fall of 1950 (*Billboard,* Oct. 7, 1950, p. 62). "Rock-A-Bye Baby Blues" from that session also went to the top of *Billboard*'s ratings (Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook). Hill and Range Songs listed "The Warm Red Wine" (from the May, 1949, session) among "current best sellers"; see their *Catalogue Quarterly* for Oct., Nov., Dec., 1949, Apr., May, June, 1950.

Bob Wills (fiddle) and Tommy Duncan (vocals) in Santa Barbara, California, in the late 1940s. *(Courtesy Joe Holley)*

Clowning around in Sacramento, 1948 or 1949. *Front row, left to right:* Tiny Moore (fiddle), Eldon Shamblin (guitar), Mancel Tierney (trumpet), unidentified bassist, Herb Remington, Jesse Ashlock (fiddle); *back row, mounted:* Luke Wills, Alex Brashear, Billy Jack Wills, Bob Wills. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys, Wills Point, California, late 1948 or early 1949. *Left to right:* Eldon Shamblin (guitar), Tiny Moore (fiddle), Luke Wills (vocals), Bob Wills (fiddle), Billy Jack Wills (drums), Johnny Gimble (fiddle), Jack Loyd (bass), Alex Brashear (trumpet), unidentified pianist, Herb Remington (steel guitar). *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

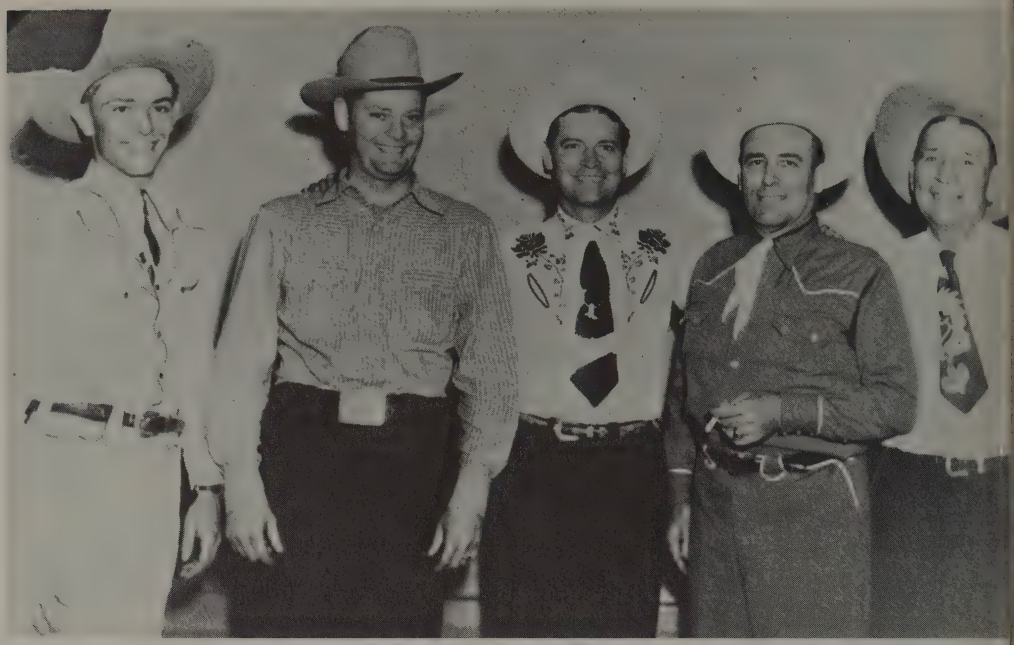
Wills Point, California, a recreational center owned by Bob Wills from 1947 until the mid-1950s. *(Courtesy Bo and Betty Wills)*

Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys, Oklahoma City, 1949. *Left to right:* Eldon Shamblin (guitar), Lucky Moeller, Bob White (fiddle), Tiny Moore (mandolin), unidentified man, Jimmy Widener (tenor banjo), Bob Wills (fiddle), Billy Jack Wills (drums), Johnny Gimble (mandolin), unidentified man, Keith Coleman (fiddle), Luke Wills (bass), Mancel Tierney (piano), Herb Remington (steel guitar), John Wills (fiddle). *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

Advertising crackers on KBYE, Oklahoma City, 1949. *Kneeling, left to right:* Luke Wills, Billy Jack Wills, Keith Coleman, Johnny Gimble, Al Flores; *standing:* Mancel Tierney, Tiny Moore, John Wills, Bob White, unidentified announcer, Bob Wills, Herb Remington, Jimmy Widener, Eldon Shamblin. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

Johnnie Lee Wills and his orchestra in front of Cain's Dancing Academy, late 1940s. *(Courtesy Don Dennis)*

Johnnie Lee Wills and his Boys, late 1940s or early 1950s. *(Courtesy Eddie Gilbert Townsend)*



John Wills and his sons, late 1940s. *Left to right:* Billy Jack, Luke, Johnnie Lee, Bob, John W
(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)

John Wills and his daughters. *Seated, left to right:* Helen, Eloise, Ruby, Alga, Lorene; *standing:* J
Wills. *(Courtesy Eloise Wills House)*

Emma and John Wills, late 1940s or early 1950s. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

As it was in the beginning: Bob Wills seconds while John Wills plays the fiddle. Photo made backstage at the Kentucky Theatre, Louisville, Kentucky, 1944. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

John and Emma Wills with their sons, late 1940s or early 1950s. *Left to right:* Johnnie Lee, Luke, John, Emma, Billy Jack, Bob. *(Courtesy Gertrude Wills Fowler)*

Bob and his family in 1950. *Left to right:* Betty Wills holding Diane, James Robert II, Carolyn, Bob Wills. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

19

Just Lookin' for a Home

> Rock and Roll? Why, man, that's the same kind of music we've been playin' since 1928! . . . it's just basic rhythm and has gone by a lot of different names in my time. It's the same, whether you follow just a drum beat like in Africa or surround it with a lot of instruments. The rhythm's what's important.
>
> Bob Wills

> We were "just lookin' for a home."
>
> Betty Wills

In the summer of 1949, Wills decided he could not make it in California, so he reversed the *Grapes of Wrath* pattern and migrated from California back to the land of the Okies.[1] Since Johnnie Lee Wills was well established in Tulsa, Bob chose Oklahoma City as a base of operation. He began a series of popular radio shows over KBYE which were rebroadcast over many other stations in the Southwest on the "Bob Wills network."[2] From the beginning the efforts in Oklahoma City were doomed to failure because Wills was rarely there. After he got back to Oklahoma, California fans demanded that MCA book him for tours in their state. "He was on the road most of the time," Betty complained. "There was always that desire to establish something to where you could work steadily and not have to hit the road." But the big money he made on national tours lured him away from the territory he was trying to build.[3] At the time, one perhaps could not have expected Wills to do otherwise. His family was growing—on October 3, 1950, a third child was born, a daughter they named Diane—and Bob felt he had to make the big money while he could.

In 1950 the Wills family moved again, this time to Dallas, where Bob opened the fabulous Bob Wills Ranch House.[4] An investor had built the structure. It was Texas size, one of the largest buildings for dancing anywhere in the country. It was as long as a football field—three hundred feet—and nearly as wide. Twice as many people could dance in it as at Cain's Dancing Academy in Tulsa.[5] Wills leased the building and finished

it inside. He installed the finest fixtures, including a huge bar inlaid with seventeen hundred silver dollars. He even provided stalls for Punkin and other horses, where people could go during the dance to see them. The horses were shod with special rubber shoes, and Wills rode Punkin onto the dance floor once a night. The Ranch House was ideal for a man with Wills's western image.

The place ran afoul, however, before Wills got it open, and it did not run much better thereafter. He always told Betty he "couldn't be an entertainer *and* a businessman." He felt if he tried to be both, either his music or his business, or both, would suffer.[6] Though there was some wisdom in this statement, it was partially an excuse for not looking after his business as he should have. It was true, as his best friends and closest business associates all confirmed, that Wills was a "very poor business man." Nevertheless, he could not have done worse than the wretches he allowed to run his affairs in Dallas. Bob hired an accountant, a bookkeeper, and others to manage the business and the finishing of the Ranch House. He acted in this case, as he did so often, as if everybody was as honest as he was.[7] Unfortunately, his assumption was wrong. He appeared to pay little or no attention to what these people purchased or how they ran his affairs. For example, the man who bought the Ranch House after Bob gave it up said that he had never seen such poor judgment in the buying of supplies. Someone had bought enough detergents, soap, floor wax, and similar supplies to last the Ranch House a hundred and fifty years. "I mean it," he repeated, "one hundred and fifty years."[8] This was merely one example of waste and poor management. It was by no means the worst of the situation.

Shortly after Wills took over the Ranch House, he had to leave on a national tour. He told Betty to get any money she needed from the bookkeeper and have all household bills sent to the Ranch House. Bob had been gone just a few days when Betty received a statement of a past-due account from the Sanger-Harris department store. The bookkeeper assured her everything would be taken care of. She also wanted to pick up some money but was told her husband had picked it up for her. When Bob got home, he went by to pick up the money and was told his wife had picked it up. After Bob and Betty compared stories, Bob called for an explanation. He had to dismiss the dishonest accountant and his henchmen. It was discovered they had put fictitious people, such as contractors and laborers, on the payroll.[9] Wills found a stack of bills—which Betty paid that night—in excess of $8,000. What was much worse, he later discovered that the accountant had not paid amusement taxes, social security and withholding taxes on the employees, and Wills's personal income taxes. Since he was about to leave on another national tour, he arranged for his lawyers to handle the payment. Somehow, the lawyers either did not or could not resolve the tax problems, and when Bob returned, the officials told him he

had a few hours to pay, or else go to jail. They tied up everything in the Ranch House, "lock, stock, and barrel."[10]

To raise this money on such short notice, Wills had to sell the Bob Wills Music Company, which he had made into a profitable enterprise. Bob and Betty's main concern at the time, of course, was to keep Bob from going to jail. Not surprisingly, they acted with too much haste and too little deliberation. "San Antonio Rose" was with another publisher, and it and other of Wills's best and most lucrative compositions were not mentioned at all in the negotiations. But after the transaction was complete, Bob and Betty discovered a small piece of paper among the documents they had signed without reading: they had sold Wills's most famous composition, "San Antonio Rose," as well as other music.[11] From that day until the day he died, Wills never received royalties from his best-known work. As late as the mid-1970s, "San Antonio Rose" alone was earning more royalties every six months than Bob and Betty received for it and all the other music they sold in this entire transaction.[12] Unfortunately, this deal was made so hurriedly that Wills did not consult the Tulsa lawyer he had retained since the 1930s. Wills, however, was so beaten by the whole situation in Dallas that he refused to take legal action on what he always believed was a fraudulent transaction.[13]

Not even the proceeds from the sale of his music company and royalties were enough to pay Bob's back taxes, the fines, and the interest. He sold property in California and other places and sent Eldon Shamblin to southern Oklahoma to borrow twenty thousand dollars from a rancher. The rancher was an avid Bob Wills fan, had been a friend for years, and had even traveled with the band. When Shamblin phoned him concerning the loan, the rancher said that that was "a lot of money" on such short notice and that he "might have to dig it up in the yard." By the time Eldon reached the ranch, the friend had come up with the twenty thousand.[14]

Bob Wills never recovered from this financial and legal disaster in Dallas. It was much worse than even Betty's description—"a bitter blow"—could express. It took Bob several years to pay off the losses he sustained at the Ranch House—but the income from most of his music was lost forever.[15]

Eldon Shamblin knew the operation in Dallas could have been a great thing.

> Bob hired an accountant that didn't do his job. One of Bob's worst faults, I guess you could call it a fault, he was raised to do what he said he would do. If you told him something he believed it. We were in a business that you didn't exist in if you did this. . . . His word was his bond. This cost him thousands, trusting people. But this was his way of life. How do you condemn a man for living by these standards? It may be bad business, but it was not bad morals. Wouldn't it be nice if everybody lived by Bob's standards? . . . But you can't do

> it. You are dealing with too many shyster people. They are out to take you. If we had a guarantee and the weather was bad, Bob would give them part of the money back. I've seen him do it hundreds of times.[16]

For instance, the band played Clinton, Oklahoma, one evening after a heavy rain. Only four couples were able to cross an area that was very shortly under water. No one else could get to the ballroom. Bob and the band played four hours without even taking an intermission. At the conclusion of the dance, the manager brought a check for $1500, which Bob refused to accept: "Forget it. Chalk this up to a rehearsal. We'll be back someday." Smokey Dacus identified another part of Wills's philosophy as "live and let live." This attitude, and that of trusting mankind, ran aground in Dallas.[17]

After the tax incidents, Bob tried to get his business straightened out, and for the first time since they married, Betty began to help in business matters. "We had wonderful crowds but were losing money," Betty remarked. "It would have gone if he could have stayed there and taken care of it himself. Even the janitors were stealing. Bob had to go on the road to pay for that."[18] Wills had two bands, one he left at the Ranch House, and his main band, which he took on tours. Joe Ferguson, who was in both the prewar Tulsa band and the 1951 band, said, "Technically, the 1951 band was best musically, though it did not have the spirit of the old band." He felt the 1951 band was "cooler" musically.[19] They took a nine-week tour to the West Coast in the fall of 1951 and had two recording sessions for MGM in September. Bob Wills and Joe Holley played violins; Joe Andrews, bass and vocals; Joe Ferguson, bass and vocals; Cotton Whittington, electric guitar; Ocie Stockard, tenor banjo; Bobby Koeffer, steel guitar; Skeeter Elkins, piano; probably Paul Magee, drums; Carolina Cotton also provided vocals. The best recordings to come out of the sessions were three fiddle tunes Wills had recorded originally in the thirties, "Silver Bell[s]," "Twinkle [Twinkle Little] Star," and "Brown Skin Gal." The tour was very successful, and in Seattle and elsewhere the performances were sold out. One reason for this success, according to Joe Ferguson, was that Wills "made every job" on the nine-week tour and never touched any alcohol.[20] This was important to band members at that time, because his drinking had been excessive during the stay in Dallas and, in fact, was one of the principal reasons the Ranch House venture was unsuccessful. The band returned in the late fall of 1951. Wills played dances at the Ranch House, broadcast over WFAA, and made dance dates within driving distance of Dallas.

But Bob was tired. He was disgusted with having to stay on the road just to keep the Bob Wills Ranch House open. He had built one of the finest dancing establishments in America and had brought the Hollywood atmosphere to it, but still had not created another Tulsa. After the New

Year's dance in 1952, he broke up his band and sold the Ranch House to Jack Ruby, who was to become a tragic figure in the Kennedy assassination more than a decade later.[21] The Wills family returned to Wills Point in California. Wills had his band back together by March, 1952, and took it to Dallas for a recording session.[22] The personnel was about the same as the year before. They recorded eight selections, among them "I Won't Be Back Tonight," "A Red Hot Needle," "Steamboat Stomp," and "Trouble, Trouble Blues" (Bob's version of the old Bessie Smith song "Down Hearted Blues").[23] Bob was never better as a blues singer than he was in this last recording.

Wills did not stay very long in California. The economic situation was bad there in 1952. Eldon Shamblin, who was handling the band's business affairs at that time, said, "In L.A. in '52, the bottom fell out. Nobody was working. Nobody could do any good. TV was terrific and was the big item."[24] Leaving Shamblin at Wills Point to manage affairs there, Wills moved his band from the West Coast to the Texas coast. Or near the Texas Coast—to Houston, where he was featured at the Plantation Club. Crowds were very good there, as they were on his national and regional tours that year.[25]

But all of that year's success was forgotten when Bob's father died of a heart attack on December 28, 1952.[26] "Uncle John," as he was known to thousands, had been in ill health for almost five years. He had been able to make one final trip that year to visit Bob in Houston. John Tomkins Wills was seventy-two when he died. Through his own efforts, and even more through his sons, he had left a mark on American music. "Faded Love," which he used to play down between the rivers in West Texas, is an American classic that is still played and recorded in the 1970s.

Early in 1953, the Wills family and organization were back at Wills Point in California, still looking for a home.[27] On March 16, Bob and the band made some recordings for MGM in Hollywood. Wills and Jesse Ashlock played fiddles; Jack Loyd, bass and vocals; Jay Roberts, guitar and vocals; Billy Bowman, steel guitar; Skeeter Elkins, piano; Eldon Shamblin, electric guitar; Billy Jack Wills, vocals; Jack Greenback, drums; Luke Wills, bass.[28] They cut seven sides, and though there was some good jazz guitar work, there was not a distinguished recording among them. The records sold well, but they clearly lacked the spark of the Wills's recordings of the thirties and forties. Was it the loss of Tommy Duncan, or the fact that he simply did not have as many quality musicians as he had a few years earlier? One of his musicians believed the bad breaks at the Ranch House in Dallas had brought Wills to a low ebb both personally and musically: "I never saw anything take as much out of a man."[29] Whatever the reason, this session did not mark one of the band's better performances.

In the summer of 1953, Bob Wills and his family moved back to West

Texas and bought a home in Amarillo, about one hundred miles from the river place where western swing was born. Both the *Amarillo Globe-Times* and radio station KGNC publicized Wills's return to his home area. "Bob Wills has come to town—to stay," the newspaper said. "The Texas farmer's son who went to barber college [in Amarillo] and wound up playing a $5,000 fiddle as one of the nation's top entertainers has brought his Texas Playboys to Amarillo." The next day the *Amarillo Daily News* stated, "Thirty years after his radio debut—in the days of KGRS and WDAG—Bob Wills is moving back to the town where he started in the fiddlin' business and plans to make it permanent." He began his broadcasts, which were live and open to the public, in Studio A at KGNC on July 16, 1953.[30]

Again, the familiar story: Wills was in such demand across the country for personal appearances that he was rarely in Amarillo. He made a tour through California in March, 1954, and cut his final recording session for MGM. The members of the band were about the same as for the session the year before. He added Louis Tierney on saxophone in 1954, making this the second session since 1949 in which he used horns. Bob Wills played violin; Louis Tierney, violin and saxophone; Lee Ross, bass and vocals; Eldon Shamblin, electric guitar; Claude Fewell, tenor banjo and vocals; Billy Jack Wills, bass; Billy Bowman, steel guitar; Skeeter Elkins, piano; and possibly Johnny Megetto, drums. The session included a variety of sounds, everything from "Doin' the Bunny Hop" and "Cadillac in Model 'A' " to "Waltzing in Old San Antone," "St. Louis Blues," and "A Maiden's Prayer."[31] When Wills returned home, the family prepared to leave West Texas. Though Bob and Betty Wills had intended to remain in Amarillo indefinitely, they left in the spring of 1954.[32] Their stay was hardly as permanent as the newspaper and radio station had predicted.

They moved back to Wills Point in 1954 to try to straighten out that business.[33] It had not been making the profit they thought it could. They divided the operation, putting the ballroom under one management and the swimming pool and amusement area under another. Betty managed the latter and cleared more than $5,000 in the summer of 1954, thus discovering the ballroom was not paying its way. In hopes of helping business, Wills spent several thousand dollars putting new steel beams in the ballroom and remodeling it generally.[34] In 1955 he had a television show in Los Angeles, which kept him away a good deal of the time. While in Los Angeles, he signed a new recording contract, with Decca. His first Decca session, in 1955, included eighteen selections, which reflected the versatility Wills liked and always had in his prewar bands: older race music, "New Osage Stomp" and "Four or Five Times"; pop music, "Sincerely"; western swing, "San Antonio Rose"; and five fiddle tunes with Wills at his best, "Spanish Two-Step," "Lone Star Rag," "Beaumont Rag," "Don't Let the Deal Go Down," and "Black and Blue Rag."[35] Eight of the recordings

from this session were used for the Wills western swing album Decca produced in the 1950s in its Dance-O-Rama series.[36] Later these and other recordings Wills made for Decca were reissued on two LPs that are still available.

The reorganization of Wills Point, the television show in Los Angeles, and the recording session with Decca were not Bob and Betty's only obligations. On January 15, 1955, Betty Wills gave birth to their fourth and last child, a daughter named Cindy.

In many ways, 1955 was a good year for the Wills family, but money was tight in California, and attendance at dances was lower than it had been since 1952. Wills therefore left his family in California and went on another national tour. His band at that time, Betty remarked, was in every respect "very mediocre . . . about as weak as he ever had." One member of the band called it the weakest band of Bob's career. "There was no enthusiasm; we never rehearsed; we never pulled together. And Bob didn't have any enthusiasm." This same musician, who had performed with the Playboys in the early fifties and again in 1956, noticed a great change in the size of the crowds. Bob could draw "a thousand people on Monday night" between 1950 and 1952, but he could not do that by 1956. Entertainment habits had changed.[37] In early 1956, Wills began what promised to be a very good show tour. He was to have very little responsibility, just his personal appearances, and was guaranteed $500 a night on week nights and more on the weekends. The promoter had agreed to pay Wills every night, but paid him irregularly and was always behind with his salary. Finally, in Philadelphia, when one of the checks he had given Wills bounced, Wills called the local union, which told the promoter to pay up or close the show. He closed it.[38]

After Bob returned to California, he and Betty decided to lease their whole operation at Wills Point and go back to Amarillo. They still owned a home there and liked the area and its schools. Amarillo was centrally located and had always been one of their favorite places. The Amarillo newspapers again praised Wills for "coming home," and he began regular broadcasts on KGNC radio and television.[39] However, he was often away on tours, this time in the Midwest. On June 15, 1956, shortly after the family moved to Texas, the ballroom at Wills Point was destroyed: "Flash Fire Levels Wills Point Ballroom; Arson Is Suspected."[40] Bob lost the money he had recently put into improvements, but sold the property at a good price because it was generally believed (though erroneously) that a highway was to be constructed adjacent to it.

In 1956, Bob Wills made his first recordings in Nashville. He may have recorded a few selections there earlier, perhaps in late 1955, but his first important Nashville session was in November, 1956.[41] In that session and in one early the next year in Los Angeles, he recorded some of his best folk

music: "New Faded Love" (there was nothing new about it), "Bob's Breakdown," "Texas Two-Step," "Wills Breakdown," and "Betty's Waltz" (an old folk tune renamed for his wife). For the first time, also, he used some of the very capable talent in Nashville, such as Tommy Jackson, a fine young fiddler. Jackson, like many young fiddle players, had been greatly influenced in his formative years by listening to Wills's recordings. Wills was already something of a folk hero in Nashville; like Jimmie Rodgers, he was considered one of the fathers of country music. But since he had never recorded in Nashville, most artists there had never seen him. Music City, U.S.A., saw and heard a good deal more of Wills during the next decade and a half, and his influence on what was later called the Nashville sound became even more pronounced. Nashville artists like Tommy Jackson, who admired the Wills style, began to inject more of it into their country music recordings. Bob's style never changed in those years; Nashville's did.

In 1957, Bob moved to Abilene, Texas, mainly because some of his band members were living there and it made their work together more convenient.[42] In Abilene, for the first time, he tried to get along without a radio broadcast. Technological changes had made radio less important for dance bands than it once was. Television had become the important medium, and local television stations did not reach far enough to help attract crowds from outside the immediate area. Even worse for dance orchestras, it kept people home when the bands came to their areas. "TV is the culprit of all entertainment business," Leon McAuliffe complained. "It made [the people] take the easy way in life." Before television, the Playboys or McAuliffe's own band "could play Springdale once a month, Rogers once a month, and Joplin once a month. After television, you must play less often and play all the way to Los Angeles, New York, and Miami." If one had a regular band, as Wills did, he had to keep traveling to maintain the margin of profit he once had by playing in one region.[43]

In late 1957, Bob decided to return to Tulsa, to help Johnnie Lee Wills rebuild the dance crowds at Cain's. Johnnie Lee, like most leaders of dance bands, had to face the problems of television and of changing amusement habits generally. Shortly after Bob arrived, he had an accident and was hospitalized for a day or two. The doctors discovered "pockets on his intestines" and decided he needed surgery at once. When he learned of his condition, he had Betty move the family from Abilene to Tulsa. He stayed in the hospital six weeks but was out in time for one of his favorite events, the Johnnie Lee Wills Stampede, which Bob had started in 1939, one of the nation's leading rodeos on the Rodeo Cowboys Association circuit. He could not ride a horse, as he had always done, but was able to appear in an automobile in the parade.

Shortly after Bob returned to Tulsa, Jim Downing of the *Tulsa Tribune* wrote a feature story entitled "Wills Brothers Together Again—Bob Back

with Heavy Beat."[44] Interestingly, though by that time Wills's music was considered country-and-western, the article never mentioned that genre but mainly compared Wills's style with rock-and-roll. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Wills appreciated and praised the form. "Rock and Roll? Why, man, that's the same kind of music we've been playin' since 1928!" Rock and roll, Bob added, would be around "forever." "What I mean is that people don't change much. We didn't call it 'rock and roll' back when we introduced it as our style in 1928, and we don't call it rock and roll the way we play it now. But it's just basic rhythm and has gone by a lot of different names in my time." He concluded, "It's the same, whether you follow just a drum beat like in Africa or surround it with a lot of instruments. The rhythm's what's important."[45]

Bob and Johnnie Lee Wills combined their bands and operated out of Tulsa, with daily broadcasts for General Mills over KVOO, as they had in the 1930s and early 1940s. The people of that five-state area liked having Bob home again. During his brief stay in Tulsa in 1957 and 1958 and for some months thereafter, he led one of the best bands he had put together since World War II. It was a swinging group with a big-band sound and two front lines, one made up of three violins, the other of three saxophones.[46] It was like old times, and Bob loved it. There is little doubt that in spite of television and the fact that people did not dance so much any more, Bob and Johnnie Lee could have rebuilt Tulsa into what it had once been for them. That is, if they had stayed. Wills was in demand again in the West, not California this time, but Las Vegas, Nevada, where Bob's new agent, Sam Gibbs, booked him at the Showboat. Johnnie Lee decided to give up the radio show to go with Bob and the band. Television had taken a great deal of his audience, and the broadcast was not nearly so popular as a decade earlier. For twenty-three years either Bob or Johnnie Lee Wills had had a radio show for General Mills, and either Bob or Johnnie Lee had broadcast over KVOO for nearly twenty-five years, since February 9, 1934. When Johnnie Lee and General Mills took the show off the air, it marked the end of an age.

Bob Wills did not particularly like playing in Las Vegas because music there was for show, not for dancing.[47] It worried him when people merely listened and did not dance. And when anyone walked off to gamble while he was playing (exactly what the management wanted), Wills was hurt. Nevertheless, the contracts involved so much money that Wills complained only to Johnnie Lee or to Betty. Between engagements at Las Vegas, Bob and the band made cross-country tours. Shortly after he began playing the Showboat, Betty and the children moved to Las Vegas. They bought a home there, and Las Vegas was their base for the next two years.

The Showboat engagement was just the first of many dates Wills played in the Las Vegas area during the next few years. In 1959 the Golden

Nugget in Las Vegas approached Wills concerning personal appearances. Sam Gibbs made the final arrangements, and Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys got top billing at the Nugget. Gibbs was able to sign a contract for nearly a thousand dollars a week more than Wills originally asked for. He felt Wills always undersold himself and "never really realized how great he really was." The Bob Wills show went over well at the Golden Nugget and was featured there for several different engagements during the next couple of years.[48]

In the meantime, casinos, clubs, and hotels in other parts of Nevada learned of Wills's success in Las Vegas. Gibbs booked him for an extended series of appearances at Lake Tahoe. When opening night came, Bob got drunk and failed to appear. The management called Gibbs at his Wichita Falls, Texas, office, and Gibbs then called Wills. Despite Gibbs's assurances that Bob would be there in a night or two, he still did not appear. After several more nights went by without him, customers complained bitterly, and the management considered cancelling the Bob Wills show.[49] The publicity director at the casino, a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, asked the management to allow him to try to help Wills before they made the final decision to cancel. He took Bob to an AA meeting in Reno, which proved quite helpful to him, as the organization itself would be for the rest of his career. Wills was an immediate success at Lake Tahoe.

Gibbs believed there were particular situations or times in Wills's life when he was especially susceptible to drinking, which in Bob's case always meant drinking to excess. For instance, after experiencing a great success, he would say, "Boys, let's have a little drink to celebrate." Everyone but Bob knew it would end in his getting drunk and sick. In other words, Bob Wills often drank for the same reason many other people drink—to have a good time. Leon McAuliffe, who was in Wills's band for more than seven years and knew him about as well as anyone, suggested that it would be an error to view Bob as helpless where alcohol was concerned. Bob once touched his head and said to McAuliffe, "I enjoyed putting every one of these old gray hairs in my head." Leon, while admitting that Bob's drinking kept him from even greater achievement in music, declared that Bob may have been perfectly content with what he did achieve.[50] It is quite possible he *was* happy with his career and life the way they were. Wills was a complex man, and so was his drinking problem.

Bob might be completely exhausted from extensive travel and hard work, so exhausted that he absolutely could not rest, and would drink to try to relax. Or if he had a task before him and felt insecure about the challenge, he might turn to alcohol as an escape. Noel Boggs believed this was the reason Wills never appeared on Bing Crosby's radio show a decade earlier. Crosby's producer would inform Bob's manager they wanted him and the Texas Playboys on the show, and Wills would avoid it by "throwing

Bob Wills about 1950. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys in Little Rock, Arkansas, October, 1950. *Left to right:* Bobby Koefer (steel guitar), Johnny Gimble (mandolin), Bob Wills (fiddle), Rusty McDonald (banjo and vocals), Eldon Shamblin (guitar), Pee Wee Lynn (piano), Jack Loyd (bass and vocals), Billy Houck (drums), Snuffy Smith, Red Norman (saxophone). *(Courtesy Rosetta Wills Arnett)*

Bob Wills and Joe Holley, summer, 1951. *(Courtesy Joe Holley)*

Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys at the Bob Wills Ranch House, Dallas, 1952. *Seated, left to right:* Eldon Shamblin, Bob Wills, Louise Rowe, Jack Loyd; *standing:* Bill Sholt, Keith Coleman, unidentified man, Billy Bowman, Skeeter Elkins. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

Bob Wills with the Billy Jack Wills band, California, early 1950s. *Left to right:* Vance Terry (steel guitar), Tiny Moore (fiddle), Bob Wills (fiddle), Cotton Thompson (fiddle), Jack Loyd (vocals), Kenny Roberts (guitar). *(Courtesy Glenn Rhees)*

A 1942 photograph used widely in promotional material in the early 1950s. *(Courtesy Blanche Baker)*

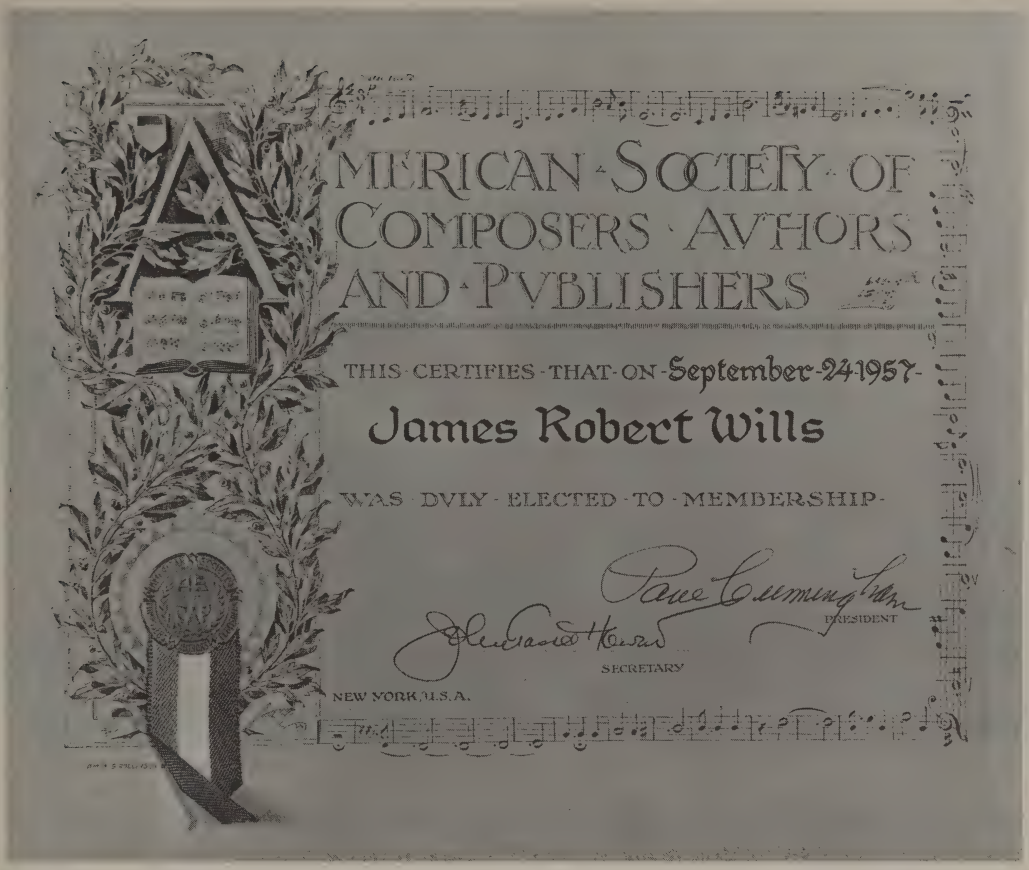
Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys at the Bob Wills Ranch House, Dallas, early 1950s. Included in this pickup band are Luke Wills (vocals), Romona Reed (vocals), Bob Wills (fiddle), Eldon Shamblin (guitar). *(Courtesy Blanche Baker)*

Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys, 1954. *Left to right:* Billy Bowman (steel guitar), Luke Wills (bass), Louis Tierney (fiddle), Johnny Dalton (drums), Bob Wills (fiddle), Joe Andrews (bass), Lou Walker (guitar), Millard Kelso (piano). *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

Publicity material, 1957. *(Courtesy Glenn Rhees)*

The Wills brothers at the Riverside Rancho, California, in the mid-1950s. *Left to right:* Bob, Luke, Billy Jack, Johnnie Lee. *(Courtesy Margie Alford)*

Bob Wills and his family, with Joe Andrews and part of his family, at the Wills home in Amarillo, 1956. *Standing, left to right:* Vickie Andrews, Joe Andrews, Jody Andrews, Bob Wills, Diane Wills, Betty Wills, Carolyn Wills; *seated:* James Robert Wills II holding Cindy Wills. *(Courtesy Joe Andrews)*



Bob Wills's certificate of membership in ASCAP, 1957. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

In the late 1950s. *(Courtesy Sam Gibbs Orchestra Service)*

The Bob Wills show at the Showboat in Las Vegas, Nevada, June, 1959. *Left to right:* Laura Lee (Owens) McBride, Gene Crownover (steel guitar), Glenn Rhees (saxophone), Rufus Thibodeaux (fiddle), Wanda Jackson (guest vocalist), Wade Peeler (drums), Dickey McBride, Bob Wills (fiddle), Luke Wills (bass), Johnnie Lee Wills (tenor banjo), Leon Rausch (guitar), Darla Daret. *(Courtesy Glenn Rhees)*

Audience, musicians, and show business stars crowd the bandstand at a tribute to Bob Wills in Wichita, Kansas, 1959. *(Courtesy Glenn Rhees)*

a drunk." As Boggs put it, Bob felt the Kraft Music Hall was just too "up town" for him.[51]

Betty added that by the mid-1950s Bob sometimes drank to get out of playing an engagement he just could not face. "He knew in his own mind after he took the first drink he was not going to play that dance. And I have thought that subconsciously he took the first drink so he wouldn't have to go to that dance," she explained. "And I told him time and time again [that] when he was away from home, 'When you get to feeling you cannot go to that dance, you don't have to take that first drink. Just call Sam and tell him you cannot make it.' I said, 'What is the difference in missing that dance that night, because you can't, than to get drunk and miss three or four of them?' I said, 'If you can't face it that night, you're tired in general, just don't go to that one.' "[52]

Gibbs thought the reason Wills drank excessively on opening night at Lake Tahoe was that he felt insecure about performing there. "That was one of those times, I think, when Bob got drunk because he was scared. Of all of the people we booked, Wills was the one we least expected to get scared of a [Nevada] date, but he did." Gibbs knew Wills had a drinking problem when he began booking him, but he lived with it, sympathized with it, and never bothered him about it. Gibbs himself was a teetotaler, and when people insisted he drink in Bob's presence, Bob cautioned Gibbs not to do it. "Sam is getting along better without it. He doesn't need it," Bob would say. They had a close relationship, for more than fifteen years, that went beyond mere agent-and-artist. Gibbs traveled with the band at various times and knew Bob as well as anyone did outside his own family. He admired Wills's wisdom regarding show business in general and dance entertainment in particular, his deep insight into human nature, and, above all, his basic kindness and honesty. In decisions of both business and life, Gibbs said he often asked himself, "What would Bob do in this case?" He believed that Bob had a good influence on his own life and made better people of all those he touched.[53]

To Gibbs it was tragic that Wills's problem with alcohol had been so grossly exaggerated that the Bob Wills he admired was not well known. As Wills's manager from the late 1950s to the end of his career, in 1973, Gibbs said not a single engagement was canceled because of Bob's drinking. There were times during those years when he did not play jobs because he had been drinking. But if he had touched no alcohol in weeks or even months and was on the bandstand hollering and enjoying the music, people—especially the more inhibited fans—still assumed he was drunk. Even when Wills was ill (and he could be ill like anyone else), fans thought he was drunk. In all the hundreds of times Gibbs booked Wills, only once did the management refuse to pay him because of his drinking, and it was not certain that this charge was valid. Gibbs argued that if the problem had

been as excessive as rumor had it, Wills would have been difficult to book; in fact, he was in demand to the very end. Gibbs felt it was precisely this reputation for drunkenness that kept Wills from the greatness he deserved. "I could have had him on many network television shows, had there not been the uncertainty of Bob's drinking." The irony of it all was that Wills did not drink that much. On those few occasions when he did, "he pulled a good one," Gibbs acknowledged, "[but] for a man who was supposed to drink a lot, Bob Wills drank less than any man I ever knew."[54]

The engagements in Las Vegas and at Lake Tahoe lasted four to five weeks each and took up about seven months of the year.[55] They were interspersed with cross-country tours. Las Vegas remained Wills's base of operation until 1961.

One night in late 1959, Bob and Betty Wills were talking about the old days in Tulsa, and the conversation got around to Tommy Duncan. Bob called Tommy in California and invited him to Las Vegas for a visit. It was a real reunion. Johnnie Lee Wills and other members of the band had known Tommy for years. Nostalgia took Bob and Tommy all the way back to their Light Crust Doughboy days in Fort Worth. Wherever each one had appeared since their split a decade earlier, people had asked about the other and often wished they were together again.[56] Bob and Tommy therefore decided to team up again, to make some recordings, and to go on the road for national tours. Columbia expressed interest in a recording contract with Wills and Duncan, but they signed with Liberty Records. Their first album was appropriately entitled *Together Again.* Between the summers of 1960 and 1961, they made several 45s and three long-play albums. Though they recorded some new material on the singles, most of the thirty-six selections on the LPs were fresh recordings of former hits: "San Antonio Rose," "Take Me Back to Tulsa," "A Maiden's Prayer," "Dusty Skies," "Trouble in Mind," "Wabash Blues," "Li'l Liza Jane," "Mississippi River Blues," and "Silver Bells." The more than forty recordings Wills and Duncan made in 1960–61 covered the gamut of music that Wills liked best—blues, jazz, race music, fiddle tunes, pop, and swing. The personnel included Wills and Joe Holley on violins; Tommy Duncan, vocals; Gene Crownover, steel guitar; Leon Rausch, electric guitar; Luke Wills, bass; and Wade Peeler, drums. Wills added horns and reeds for these sessions, but employed no brass. Glenn Rhees played saxophone, and Jack Lloyd, one of the finest jazzmen Bob ever used, played clarinet. An unidentified piano player was also present. For the fourth and final session, July 24–25, 1961, Gene "Tag" Lambert played electric guitar; Frank McWhorter and George Clayborn, violins.[57] The LPs became quite popular and are still being sold in the mid-1970s.

In addition to the recording sessions, Bob and Tommy went on several very successful cross-country tours. "With the two of them to-

gether," Betty said, "they could work every night in the week at big money."[58] Their tours together came to an end in 1962. They might have gone on indefinitely, had it not been for Betty Wills's health. In 1960 she had gone to Tulsa for surgery, at which time about half of her stomach was removed. She no sooner got settled back in Las Vegas when she had to return to Tulsa for another operation the same year. She had to have surgery there again in 1961. Because of these circumstances, Bob and Betty moved their base to Tulsa in 1961. Fortunately, she responded well to treatment and regained her health.[59] Bob continued his tours and was still playing engagements in Las Vegas in 1962. On August 17 of that year he was pictured on the front cover of *Your Host International,* a schedule of the shows in the Las Vegas area; he was then playing Harvey's Wagon Wheel, South Shore, Lake Tahoe.[60]

In both the casinos of Nevada and on national tours, Wills drew very large audiences. Musicians who had never before been in his band found it difficult to believe anyone could have such appeal. Some of them had difficulty believing it even after they saw it. A decade and a half later they were still trying to figure it out. The crowds were so large during Bob's appearances at the Golden Nugget that one could hardly get through the crowd to play at the crap tables or pull a slot machine.[61] He was so successful at the Nugget that he had many engagements of several weeks during a more than two-year period. In fact, he got tired of playing there and asked his agent to quit booking him into the Nugget. The contract was so good that the agent paid no attention to the request. Wills therefore got drunk and showed up for an unscheduled performance—his last appearance at the Golden Nugget. Bob Wills knew how to use his drinking to get his way.[62]

Audiences on the tours were equal to those in the casinos of Nevada. In the early 1960s, for instance, because of a mix-up in booking, Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys arrived in Montrose, Colorado, two whole weeks ahead of schedule. Bob told the management of the club where they were to appear that they would drive on to their next engagement. The management suggested they go ahead and hold a dance that night since the band was already there. Bob agreed and told him they would be fair regarding the contract. Montrose had a population of less than five thousand and was quite isolated, more than sixty miles from a town of any size. Besides, it was the middle of the week, not the ideal time to draw crowds for dancing. All they did in the way of advertising was drive the bus, which had "Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys" painted on each side, down the main street of town. That night six hundred people appeared at the dance.[63]

Wills drew big audiences in places far more isolated than Montrose. He enjoyed playing a joke on new members of his band each time the bus

pulled into Apache Junction, Arizona. The ballroom was out in the desert with nothing much near it, at least nothing one could see, except sand, brush, and Gila monsters. Bob made certain he was riding in the bus, rather than in his auto, when they pulled up to the place. He acted surprised, as if he had never seen the place before, and asked, in disgust, "How are we going to draw a crowd here?" The new band members showed a look of amazement that they would stop, let alone perform, at such an out-of-the-way spot. Duncan, with a population of less than a thousand, was the nearest town. Not even Bob Wills could get a crowd here, the boys thought. But at 9:00 P.M. the place was packed with hundreds of dancers. No one ever knew where they all came from.[64]

In cities like Dallas, San Diego, Oakland, and Los Angeles, Wills drew hundreds and often thousands to his dances. The manager of a large Los Angeles ballroom and her husband saved for months to be able to afford Wills. "You had to sell your soul," she said, "to get Bob Wills on a Saturday night." Even after paying Wills a big guarantee plus a percentage of the gate, they made a very handsome profit.[65]

1. Betty Wills; Bob Wills; O. W. Mayo; Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook. See also "Bob Wills 1934 . . . Johnnie Lee Wills 1949 Celebrating 15 Years of Broadcasting over KVOO," *Tulsa Daily World,* Feb. 6, 1949; "Wills Returns to City Home," *Daily Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City), May 14, 1950; "Bob Wills and His Famed Texas Playboys Appear at City Auditorium Wednesday," *Galveston Week,* 5, no. 41 (Sept., 1951), 1; Glenn P. White Scrapbook. I am indebted to Betty Wills for suggesting the title of this chapter. The family wanted desperately to settle in one place during those years, and the line from the old Negro folksong "Boll Weevil" expressed their feelings precisely.

2. See "Parade of Portraits," *KWFT Listener* (Sept., 1949), front cover and p. 10; "Texas Playboys Broadcast from KWFT," *KWFT Listener* (Nov., 1949), p. 4. Station KWFT is in Wichita Falls, Texas, about 125 miles south of Oklahoma City. See also Glenn P. White to Buddy Wamsley, Jan. 21, 1963; Wamsley to White, Jan. 26, 1963; Johnny Gimble; Luke Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; Keith Coleman.

3. The Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook includes material about Bob's appearances throughout the nation. He was in Oklahoma City long enough to help doctors launch a campaign against tuberculosis ("Bob Wills Plugs for TB Seals and Chest X-rays," *Oklahoma City Advertiser,* Jan. 20, 1950). He also gave an exercycle to the physical therapy department of St. John's Hospital ("Exercycle Workout," *Tulsa Daily World,* Feb. 11, 1951; Sister M. Agatha to Bob Wills, Feb. 8, 1951).

4. "The Return of Robert," *Radio and Television Mirror,* 35, no. 3 (Feb., 1951), 10; "Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys," *Western Music,* 1, no. 3 (Sept., 1951), 16–17.

5. According to material in the Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook, the capacity of the Ranch House was 4,400. See "Dewey Groom: From the Mabank Flash to Big Daddy of Country Music," *Country Music Reporter,* 2, no. 2 (July, 1971), 16–18. Also Dot Townsend; Blanche Baker; Dorothy Long.

7. Eldon Shamblin; Smokey Dacus; Glenn Rhees; Joe Andrews; Wayne Johnson; Bob Lee.

8. Dewey Groom; Joe Andrews.

9. Betty Wills; Bob Wills; Eldon Shamblin; Joe Ferguson; Sleepy Johnson; Al Stricklin; Joe Andrews; Corine Andrews.

10. Betty Wills.

11. A copy of this document is in my files.
12. Confidential communication.
13. David Randolph Milsten; Betty Wills.
14. Eldon Shamblin.
15. Betty Wills. Also Bob Wills; David Randolph Milsten; Eldon Shamblin; Joe Ferguson. Sleepy Johnson believed Wills lost at least half a million dollars over the Ranch House. O. W. Mayo called it "a cruel blow."
16. Eldon Shamblin. Shamblin was business manager for the band in this period. Bookings were still managed by the Music Corporation of America, which in fact encouraged Wills to get involved in the Ranch House. Bob and Betty felt that MCA did not come through with the bookings and other arrangements they had promised before Wills went to Dallas. Listen to Betty Wills; Bob Wills; Joe Andrews.
17. Smokey Dacus; Eldon Shamblin.
18. Betty Wills; Eldon Shamblin; Al Stricklin.
19. Joe Ferguson. See Bobby Koeffer to Glenn P. White, Aug. 12, 1963.
20. Joe Ferguson; Keith Coleman; Johnny Gimble; Billy Jack Wills.
21. Joe Ferguson; Eldon Shamblin; Keith Coleman; O. W. Mayo; Betty Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; Bob Wills; Sleepy Johnson; Joe Andrews; Corine Andrews.
22. Betty Wills; Eldon Shamblin.
23. Keith Coleman; Joe Andrews; Bob Wills.
24. Eldon Shamblin.
25. Betty Wills. "See Bob Wills," *Mirror* (Los Angeles), Mar. 12, 1953, indicated that Wills planned to return to California and appear regularly at the 97th Street Corral in Los Angeles. According to an article in the *Los Angeles Express* in 1953, Wills was living in Encino. See also the advertisement for Wills's appearance at Henry's 97th Street Corral in the *Citizen-News Valley Edition* (?Los Angeles), Mar. 6, 1953. Listen also to Ray DeGeer.
26. "Heart Attack Fatal to Uncle John Wills," *Dallas Morning News,* Dec. 30, 1952.
27. See "Bob Wills," *Brad's Newsletter* (Hollywood: Hinton Bradbury), Mar. 6, 1953; "Bob Wills," *Mirror* (Los Angeles), Mar. 12, 1953.
28. Bob Wills; Betty Wills; Luke Wills; Billy Jack Wills.
29. Joe Andrews.
30. Patsy Dinan, "Bob Wills and Playboys Move Here to Join Staff of KGNC," *Amarillo Globe-Times,* July 8, 1953; "Bob Wills Band Returns for Six-a-Week Show on KGNC," *Amarillo Daily News,* July 9, 1953. Wills was to appear regularly at the Clover Club in Amarillo, which was completely remodeled for his "homecoming" ("Announcing the Clover Club Re-Opening Featuring Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys," *Amarillo Globe-Times,* July 16, 1953).
31. Eldon Shamblin; Billy Jack Wills; Luke Wills; Bob Wills.
32. Betty Wills.
33. Eldon Shamblin; Billy Jack Wills.
34. Betty Wills.
35. Some of these selections were traditional fiddle tunes; some were not actually folk music, but were recorded in a folk style. See "Decca Adds Jazz, C. & W. Sets for Fall," *Billboard,* Oct. 22, 1955, p. 16; Phillip Banister Scrapbook.
36. Decca DL 5562. Decca's Dance-O-Rama series also included ten-inch LPs of Milton Brown, Spade Cooley, Tex Williams, and others.
37. Joe Andrews. Also Eldon Shamblin; Betty Wills; Billy Jack Wills.
38. Betty Wills; Bob Wills. When Wills left MCA in the mid-1950s, Harry Peebles of Wichita, Kansas, became his agent. MCA had probably booked Wills on this show tour before he left them. Listen to Harry Peebles; Betty Wills. See also "Folk Talent & Tunes," *Billboard,* Nov. 26, 1955, p. 45.
39. Bill McReynolds, "20 Million Record Sales Later, Wills Moves Back to Amarillo," *Amarillo Globe-Times,* Aug. 2, 1956.
40. "Flash Fire Levels Wills Point Ballroom; Arson Is Suspected," *Sacramento Bee,* June 16, 1956.

41. Bob Wills and Tommy Jackson (Paul Bowling interview).

42. Betty Wills. See also the Betty Wills Datebook for 1957. Betty's datebooks include the dates and places where her husband appeared and the amount of the contact. If a guarantee against a percentage was involved, the books include the terms of the contract and the actual amount Wills received. Unfortunately, she kept these only for 1957, 1958, and 1959.

43. Leon McAuliffe. See also Betty Wills Datebook (1957).

44. Jim Downing, "Wills Brothers Together Again—Bob Back with Heavy Beat," *Tulsa Tribune,* Jan. 4, 1958. See also "Bob Wills Severs Artery in Elbow," *Tulsa Daily World,* Mar. 27, 1958; "Bob Wills Back," *Tulsa Sunday World,* Nov. 16, 1958; Bob Wills; Betty Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; Leon Rausch; Glenn Rhees; Betty Wills Datebook; Sam Gibbs Orchestra Service Datebook; "Doin' Bob's Way Again—Leon Rausch," *Country Music Reporter,* 5, no. 1 (Jan., 1974), 18.

45. "Wills Brothers Together Again." Also Bob Wills.

46. I am indebted to Bob Pinson of the Country Music Foundation Library and Media Center for a copy of a tape of this band made at Boeing Field, Wichita, Kans., Sept. 28, 1958. Bob Wills played violin; Louis Tierney, violin and saxophone; Henry Boatman, violin and saxophone; Glenn Rhees, saxophone; Gene Crownover, steel guitar; Leon Rausch, electric guitar and vocals; Johnnie Lee Wills, banjo; Luke Wills, bass; Wade Peeler, drums; and probably Millard Kelso, piano.

47. Sam Gibbs; Leon Rausch; Laura Lee Owens; Glenn Rhees; Johnnie Lee Wills; Bob Wills; Betty Wills; O. W. Mayo; Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook; Betty Wills Datebook (1958).

48. Sam Gibbs; Betty Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; Leon Rausch; Glenn Rhees; Luke Wills; Bob Wills.

49. Sam Gibbs; Luke Wills; Betty Wills Datebook (1959); Glenn Rhees.

50. Leon McAuliffe.

51. Sam Gibbs; Joe Andrews; Betty Wills; Leon McAuliffe; Eldon Shamblin. Noel Boggs commented on the Crosby show to Glenn P. White; see White to me, Nov. 21, 1971.

52. Betty Wills.

53. Sam Gibbs. Gibbs attributed a great deal of his success as a booking agent to the fact that he "booked Bob Wills."

54. Ibid.

55. "Golden Nugget," *It's Showtime in Las Vegas,* Dec. 3, 1960; Betty Wills; James McNinch to me, June 11, 1975.

56. Bob Wills; Betty Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; Sam Gibbs; Tommy Duncan, field notes; Gene Crownover.

57. Jack Lloyd; Leon Rausch; Glenn Rhees. Listen also to the rehearsal by Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys in a Hollywood motel before their 1961 Liberty recording session.

58. Betty Wills; Sam Gibbs.

59. Ibid.; Bob Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; George Rhoades, " 'Nothing Fancy, Just Good Music': Texas Playboy Improves," *Tulsa Daily World,* Dec. 2, 1962.

60. "Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys," *Your Host International,* Aug. 17, 1962, front-page story.

61. Glenn Rhees; Leon Rausch; Johnnie Lee Wills; Laura Lee Owens; Sam Gibbs; Jack Lloyd; Gene Crownover.

62. Sam Gibbs; Betty Wills; Glenn Rhees.

63. Glenn Rhees; Sam Gibbs; Leon Rausch; Gene Crownover.

64. Glenn Rhees; Jack Lloyd; Gene Crownover.

65. Laura Lee Owens; Sam Gibbs; Glenn Rhees; Leon Rausch; Joe Andrews; Betty Wills; Gene Crownover.

20

"His Body Wore Out before His Desire"

> Bob never did wear out at this. His body wore out before his desire did.
>
> Leon McAuliffe

The last week in November, 1962, Bob Wills had a serious heart attack at Goldthwaite, Texas, en route to San Antonio. He returned to Tulsa and rested for several weeks before going back to work. Going back to work meant hitting the road again—difficult enough for a young man, and Wills would soon be fifty-eight.[1] He would soon have been playing the fiddle at dances for fifty years. His recordings show that a great deal of the old spirit was still there, but he was getting tired and did not enjoy his work as he once did. Leon McAuliffe, who was twelve years younger than Wills and quit before his boss did, said, "My desire wore out before my body. Bob never did wear out at this. His body wore out before his desire did."[2]

But this was not the end. Neither Bob's body nor his desire to perform were worn out in 1962, and certainly his popularity was not. By mid-1963 he had his band together again, toured California, and recorded for Liberty in Hollywood. Bob had a very large group for this session, fifteen including himself. Wills, Louis Tierney, Billy Armstrong, Gene Gasaway, and George Clayborn played violins, providing the characteristic Wills "fiddle ensemble" sound. Gene Crownover played steel guitar; Billy Wright, viola; Casey Dickens, drums; Gene Garf, piano; Johnny Patterson, electric guitar; Luke Wills, bass; and Tommy Allsup, rhythm guitar and bass. George Clayborn, Vicki Carr, Luke Wills, Clifford Crofford, Buz Cason, and Billy Mize sang. Most of the vocals, however, were done by Bob himself. Liberty entitled the album *Bob Wills Sings and Plays* and wanted to feature both his voice and his fiddle. Wills sang "Rosetta," "Sittin' on Top of the World," "Yearning," "My Mary," and "My Confession." He fiddled on "Don't Let the Deal Go Down," "South," and "Maiden's Prayer."

In October, 1963, Bob Wills, his family, and his Texas Playboys moved to Fort Worth. Carl Johnson, an ardent fan from that city, went to

Tulsa with a cashier's check for $10,000 and persuaded Wills to make the move.[3] There were no strings attached to this gift, no contract, no obligations; all that was expected of Bob was that he move his base of operation to Fort Worth. That was how much a Bob Wills fan Johnson was. Actually, he wanted Wills to concentrate his activity in the Dallas–Fort Worth area and not be on the road so much. Since Bob had had the heart attack the year before, he did need to take life easier. Sam Gibbs continued to do the booking. Bob played all over the Southwest and made national tours, but less often than before. His arrangement with Johnson made possible what he had wanted to do for the past few years, but never could actually bring himself to do—give up his band and work alone. He had had the responsibility of a band since 1929 and wanted to be relieved of the burden. One day in 1964, when Bob was complaining to Betty about the responsibility, she suggested, "Why don't you just sell it or give it to Carl?" A few nights later he played in Dallas, and Johnson went with him. That night, when Wills returned home, he told his wife, "I sold it to him, lock, stock, and barrel—bus, Texas Playboys, everything." Though Bob had not said anything about it, he felt morally bound to repay the $10,000 gift Johnson had given him to move to Texas. He therefore told Johnson he would sell him "bus, Texas Playboys, everything" for $10,000. But, Bob informed me, "No money passed through our hands."[4] Part of the bargain stipulated that Wills would work for Johnson and be put on a flat salary. However, it was the same band, and the boys kept going to Wills with their problems. The burden was still there.

In 1964, Wills had a second heart attack and was out of Johnson's organization for some time. He never again had a band of his own. From 1964 to the end of his career, he fronted other bands. For example, he would meet Hoyle Nix and his band somewhere in West Texas, booked as Bob Wills with Hoyle Nix and his West Texas Cowboys. Bob used Joe Andrews as his vocalist after 1964: "With my tunes, if I have my own singer I'm not at a loss."[5] During the next few years, he used other singers, Tag Lambert, for instance. On some occasions, however, he did not even provide a vocalist.

Wills himself made more money and his guarantees as a "single" were often higher than before he gave up his band.[6] He was still doing very well in the last years of his active career. His gross income was not so high, of course, as in his peak years, from the early forties to the mid-fifties, when he was grossing from a quarter of a million to more than $340,000 annually. Sam Gibbs estimated that Bob's annual income from dances and shows (not including record royalties or other sources of income) averaged $150,000.[7]

In 1964–65, Bob Wills had four recording sessions in Texas for Longhorn Records. Evidently the first two, or possibly three, occurred

before he gave up his band. In the first session, Bob Wills, George Clayborn, Gene Gasaway, and Johnny Gimble played violins; Johnny Patterson, electric guitar; Gene Crownover, steel guitar; Benny Johnson, piano; and Bob McBay, drums. Joe Andrews was the vocalist, and there was an unidentified bass player, probably Luke Wills. In other sessions, Maurice Anderson played steel guitar; Billy Carter and Walter Lyons, electric guitar; Harvey Gossman, trumpet; and Al Stricklin, piano. The selections included "Sooner or Later," "Buffalo Twist," "All Night Long," and "Faded Love," all good western swing.[8]

The third Longhorn session produced the only album of just folk music Wills ever made. It was something he had always wanted to do, but he had never found a willing recording company. Another valuable aspect of the album was that Bob commented on the music throughout. The session was so informal that even the owner of the company, Dewey Groom, participated, asking Wills to play the first fiddle tune he ever played. In a special effort to make the recordings sound as much like frontier fiddle music as possible, Wills used only four instruments. He played the fiddle; Sleepy Johnson, guitar; Marvin Montgomery, tenor banjo; and Luke Wills, bass.[9] Wills played "Faded Love" as his father and grandfather had, with a lonesome blues sound. Other selections in that session were "Big Taters in the Sandy Land," "Mayflower Waltz," "Billy in the Low Ground," "Diane Waltz," "Put Your Little Foot," "Bob's Schottische," "Gone Indian," and "No Disappointments in Heaven" (the only one with vocals).

By March 6, 1965, when he turned sixty, Bob had been in show business for more than fifty years. It had been a half century since he fiddled for his first dance, at the age of ten, in the ranch country of West Texas, and he was still in demand for personal appearances all over the country.[10] He even had to cancel some engagements in January and February because of a serious bout with pneumonia, but was out of bed in time to celebrate his sixtieth birthday. Joe Andrews observed that Bob's old enthusiasm was still there, that he still loved to perform. Joe noticed it in particular when they went to Nashville that year to play the dance for the Country Music Association's seventh anniversary. Little was said from the time they left their room until they reached the bandstand. Then Bob whispered to Andrews, "You nervous, son?" Joe nodded in the affirmative, and Bob said, "I am, too. Always remember this—you show me a horse that's not nervous, and I'll show you a horse that's comin' in last."[11] In November, he was featured again at the Golden Nugget in Carson City, Nevada.[12] One newspaper editorialized, "The Carson City Nugget has a real winner appearing in their Theatre Lounge. The Go-Go Man of Yesteryear . . . the greatest in the Country and Western field . . . Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys . . . now billed as The Bob Wills Show. . . . It's 'Mr.

Western Showmanship,' Bob Wills himself, leading the band—along with his superb fiddle playing."[13] This was more than mere show business propaganda.[14] The show was so successful that Wills was booked back in two months, and in January, 1966, the same newspaper was proclaiming, "Bob Wills Back at Carson Nugget . . . It's just a short introduction but everyone anxiously awaits for the big star of the show. Then suddenly the group breaks loose on 'San Antonio Rose' and into the Carson Nugget spotlight steps Bob Wills, Mr. Western Showbusiness."[15] This reception, in one of the most competitive areas in the entertainment world, testified to Bob's continuing attraction.

Besides his personal appearances in the mid- and late sixties, Wills was still making records, nearly one hundred between 1963 and 1969, an average of almost fourteen a year. He recorded more in the last years of his career than many artists do at their peak. Some of the recordings he made for Columbia in the thirties and forties were still available on three long-play albums,[16] and the Decca and Liberty recordings were also still selling quite well. Kapp Records of New York, noting this popularity, approached Bob's manager regarding a contract. Between 1965 and 1969, Wills made five LPs and a few singles for Kapp. Most of the sixty-five selections he had never recorded before.[17] They represented the versatile repertory Bob Wills liked best: fiddle tunes, blues, Wills's own compositions, and, especially, pop music with western lyrics.

In one of the sessions, the band Wills had turned over to Carl Johnson was used. In the others, since the recording was done in Nashville, some of Music City's finest sidemen were called in, though they were careful to reproduce the Bob Wills western swing sound. Wills's first Kapp session was on October 19, 1965, the second on July 19 and 20, 1966. A few of the recordings from these two sessions were released as singles; twelve of the fourteen items were released as Wills's first Kapp LP. It included "Deep in the Heart of Texas," "You're the Only Star in My Blue Heaven," "My Adobe Hacienda," "Kansas City," and "Gone Indian." A second album, recorded March 21–23, 1967, offered "San Antonio Rose," "Sugarfoot Rag," "Big Beaver," and "Comanche Hit and Run." Mel Tillis and Tag Lambert were the vocalists. The band Wills took to his third Kapp session, in September, 1967, was similar, in composition and size, to the one he had in Tulsa on the eve of World War II. The twenty-one performers included six violins (counting Wills), three saxophones, a trombone, two trumpets, two electric guitars, a steel guitar, drums, piano, and a tenor banjo. Wills's big-band style was especially evident on "Here's That Man Again," "Riders in the Sky," "Cimarron," and "Lily Dale." He included two old-time fiddle tunes, "Big Taters in the Sandy Land" and "Fiddle Bird." Most of this album was dominated by the fiddle ensemble which Wills innovated in the thirties and which became one of his trademarks. A fourth Kapp LP, recorded April

16–18, 1968, included "Across the Alley from the Alamo," "South of the Border," "Silver Bells," and "Limehouse Blues." His one other Kapp session will be discussed later.

Wills was never satisfied with recordings he made in Nashville. In fact, he did not like to record there at all, especially if he had to use local musicians. Other than a few who had learned his style in the Southwest and later moved to Nashville, he did not think the musicians there could play his style successfully. They could not get the beat and rhythm he liked. I once commented to Bob that he must have been proud of the big band he used in Nashville for the album *Here's That Man Again, Bob Wills.* He retorted, "Hell, no! That damn bunch in Nashville just ruins my music."[18]

To the end of his career, Bob's recordings kept the distinctive Bob Wills sound. To the end, he refused to compromise his style. By the late 1960s he realized his music was unique, and he began to reject the idea of being neatly categorized by commercial nomenclators who classified music as others would shoes, for example, into preset styles, colors, and sizes. Wills believed the music he wrote and performed, his style, and his repertory were always broader than the terms *popular* or *country and western* connote. For better or worse, he stayed close to the style he pioneered. He never played Nashville style in order to have his records plugged on top-forty country stations. Nor would he go strictly to a pop style in order to get his records played over middle-of-the-road stations. Economically, this was a mistake. For like the man without a country, Wills was almost without a place in the music industry, particularly after 1950, when radio stations increasingly specialized in one form or another of commercial popular music. While country music by the late fifties and early sixties was reaching audiences far greater than Wills ever had, his style was not close enough to that of Nashville to be very popular on country-and-western stations, even though he was usually labeled "country and western." On the other hand, while pop or middle-of-the-road stations also had vast audiences, and he played a good deal of pop music, especially swing and dance tunes with romantic lyrics, he was never accepted in the pop music fraternity either. Wills refused to alter his style to become more commercially appealing, and for this reason he had to survive with a dance band after most musicians had turned to other, more lucrative forms of show business.

1. Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook; George Rhoades, " 'Nothing Fancy, Just Good Music': Texas Playboy Improves," *Tulsa Daily World,* Dec. 2, 1962; "Ailing Bob Wills Resting Better," *Tulsa Tribune,* Nov. 29, 1962.

2. Leon McAuliffe.

3. Betty Wills; Leon Rausch; Dewey Groom; Johnny Manson; Bob Wills; Gene Crownover.

4. Bob Wills; Betty Wills; Leon Rausch; Johnny Manson; Joe Andrews.

5. Joe Andrews; Corine Andrews; Betty Wills; Hoyle Nix.

6. Sam Gibbs.

7. Ibid. Gibbs's firm figured on $15,000 per year for booking Wills at a fee of 10 percent of Bob's gross. Gibbs made available all of Bob's contracts and schedules for this study and was helpful in many other ways.

8. Johnny Gimble; Al Stricklin; Joe Andrews; Luke Wills; Gene Crownover; Dewey Groom.

9. Marvin Montgomery; Sleepy Johnson; Luke Wills; Bob Wills; Dewey Groom. Listen also to *Bob Wills Keepsake Album No. 1,* Longhorn LP-001.

10. Sam Gibbs.

11. Joe Andrews. See also Jo Walker, Country Music Association, to Bob Wills, Oct. 29, 1965, for an account of Wills's Nashville appearance.

12. "Bob Wills at Carson Nugget," *Territorial Enterprise and Virginia City* (Nev.) *News,* Nov. 12, 1965.

13. L. Lew Hardy, "The Family Out to Dinner—Vie Wed," *Territorial Enterprise and Virginia City News,* Nov. 19, 1965.

14. Betty Wills; Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook.

15. "Bob Wills Back at Carson Nugget," *Territorial Enterprise and Virginia City* (Nev.) *News,* Jan. 21, 1966. See also "Wills Brings Youth to Carson Nugget," ibid., July 28, 1966.

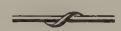
16. *Bob Wills Special,* Harmony HS 11358; *The Great Bob Wills,* Harmony HL 7345; *The Best of Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys,* Harmony HL 7304. Harmony is Columbia's budget label.

17. Kapp is now part of MCA Records. I am indebted to Kenn Scott of MCA for information concerning Wills's Kapp discography (Scott to me, Mar. 15, 1973). See especially the Kapp Records artist's cards covering the period from Nov. 19, 1965, to Feb. 21, 1969, also "Veteran Bob Wills," *Nashville Banner,* July 22, 1966. Since Wills had no band of his own at the time of the Kapp session and used sidemen and musicians from other bands, I have not discussed the session personnel in the text. For this information see Bob Pinson's Discography.

18. Bob Wills.

21

Country Music Hall of Fame



> Bob Wills . . . established himself King of Western Swing . . . a living legend whose roadmap has charted new pathways into the world of American stage, radio, TV, records and movies
>
> Plaque at the Country Music Hall of Fame

Early in 1968, Bob Wills's friends in the Dallas–Fort Worth area began to insist that he accompany them to Nashville to attend the October convention at which the annual Country Music Association awards are made. Harvey Frazier and Carl Johnson, among others, were so certain Bob would be voted into the Country Music Hall of Fame that year, they made him promise he would go with them. "He had been nominated several times and had been kept in through the eliminations," Betty Wills said, "but we just did not think they would put him in the Hall of Fame, because Nashville didn't think Bob was part of Nashville. And years before, that is the way they felt. . . . He was not country, he was western," she added. "He never felt he was part of the Grand Ole Opry, wasn't in any way connected. . . . The year they voted Eddy Arnold in, there was a lot of controversy, you know, because they said he was pop, he wasn't Nashville. There were a lot of letters written to the *Music City News*. I read all that, so we had talked it over and he said that they were mistaken. They wouldn't put him in. He really didn't think they would."[1]

Regardless of his friends' high hopes, Wills never seriously thought it would ever occur. In fact, he accepted a booking at Cain's Academy for the night of the annual awards. Though he was not taking so many bookings as a few years earlier, he was still playing somewhere every third night.[2] He was working more after mid-week and on weekends. He still made cross-country tours, but he was playing more in the Southwest, so that he could be home with his family in the early part of the week.

As the awards day drew nearer, Bob's friends reminded him of his promise. Sam Gibbs cancelled the engagement at Tulsa and another at

Oklahoma City to make certain Wills would have no excuse not to go to Nashville.[3] Also, the Country Music Association had scheduled Wills to present one of the awards. Wills and his companions left Fort Worth on October 16. When Betty kissed Bob good-bye, she said, "Well, now, it doesn't make any difference this year, because you are not going to get it this year. But next year, I want to go with you. Next year they might put you in. . . ."[4] Late in the afternoon of the day the awards were to be made, Bob called his wife to report he had just been down to the auditorium to put on makeup because he had to make an award. "That was what they used to get him down there," she explained. Bob himself still had no more hope of getting the coveted award than he had months earlier.[5]

That night, October 18, 1968, several thousand spectators and several hundred artists and special guests assembled in historic Ryman Auditorium for the country music awards show, the climax of a week of activities in Music City, U.S.A., that included WSM's forty-third Grand Ole Opry anniversary celebration and DJ convention. There were 6001 registrants for just that event. Country-and-western disc jockeys, officials of recording companies, and recording and show business personalities from around the world were in the Opry House. One Nashville paper called the show "the Country Music equivalent of Hollywood's Oscar. . . ."[6] Glen Campbell, Chet Atkins, Dolly Parton and Porter Wagoner, Buck Owens's Buckaroos, Johnny Cash, Tammy Wynette, Sheb Wooley, and Bobby Russell were among the award recipients.

Bob Wills made two appearances on stage that night. Of the first, the *Nashville Banner* gave the following account: "Gov. Jimmie Davis and the 'King of Western Swing,' Bob Wills, received a standing ovation from the audience and then named 'Honey' the 'song of the year.' "[7] Bobby Russell accepted his writer's award for that song. The final event was the naming of the new members of the Country Music Hall of Fame. "[Bob had] already read his lines and had gone backstage and was talking to Ferlin Husky in a little room. Three men ran back and hollered, 'Bob! Bob! They want you out there!' " "Wills had disappeared," the *Banner* continued, "and it was several minutes before he could be located."[8] It probably *seemed* like several minutes. Bob walked on stage, wearing his white cowboy hat, still not thinking he would be given the award. Then two old friends, Tex Ritter and Roy Acuff, already members of the Hall of Fame, announced Bob's election. One called him "a folk hero who grew into a reachable hero." The audience gave Wills his second standing ovation of the evening, this time as "the newest member in County Music's immortal hall." Eyewitnesses detected the "faintest trace of tears in his eyes." After a slight pause, however, he regained his composure and expressed thanks. Then he removed his white hat and said, "I don't usually take my hat off to nobody, but I sure do to you folks."[9]

The country music awards show was not televised the night the awards

were actually made. NBC taped it for airing on October 30 on the "Kraft Music Hall."[10] Though Betty and the children saw it later on television, the night it actually occurred they waited patiently by the telephone, hoping, but not really expecting, that Bob had won the award. "When he called me," Betty recalled, "he said, 'Guess what,' and I knew when he said that. I said, 'OK! You got it and I didn't get to see it. They were supposed to wait until next year.' "[11]

This was the highest honor Bob Wills ever received. It was especially high considering that it involved a musical field of which he never felt he was part. Naturally, Wills welcomed the honor of being voted into the Country Music Hall of Fame, but he had never thought he would be elected. By 1968 the distinction between his western swing and country music was blurred. Trade magazines, disc jockeys, record companies, and historians made little or no distinction between them. Bob Wills always made a distinction, and every member of his band made the same distinction.[12] Not one of them thought their music should be categorized as country music. Leon McAuliffe expressed their feeling best: "Our music was never country music. . . . *Country and western* is an inappropriate term, in my opinion. I can't think of a country artist we ever listened to and learned their tunes. We listened to Benny Goodman, Glenn Miller, Louis Armstrong, and [Bob] Crosby." McAuliffe added that they did not listen to country artists because there was no one in country music "near our level at that time."[13] McAuliffe's remarks reflected the aloof attitude Wills and his musicians had toward country music. In fact, there were times they left the bandstand and fought with people who referred to them as country.

What, then, is the place of Bob Wills in country music? And what is the difference between his music and contemporary country music?

In the broadest sense, it would appear difficult to exclude Wills entirely from the tradition of rural or country music. In terms of origin, his music was certainly not urban. In the beginning, Jim Rob and his father played the fiddle at West Texas country or ranch dances. This fiddle tradition was always part of Bob Wills's music. Nevertheless, he added jazz and swing idioms, even drums, brass, reeds, and piano, so that essentially he was playing nonrural pieces, in nonrural style. Wills generally made an effort to get away from, not remain close to, his rural roots. Mainstream country music has remained relatively close to its rural and folk origins—and if this ever ceases to be the case, the term *country music* will become a meaningless commercial hybrid.[14] Many people in Nashville and elsewhere who love country music fear it will lose its identity if it loses its country origins. This accounts, in part, for the determined effort many artists make to sound "country," that is, more natural and less affected. Bob Wills, by contrast, feared he *would* sound country and therefore made a determined effort to sound like popular dance bands.

One of Arthur Satherley's biggest problems with Wills was trying to

keep him close to his traditional origins. "I always tried to keep Bob from using horns. It made him sound uptown and took him away from his country music."[15] Satherley's efforts were not very successful. Nor did he like the term *western swing,* because of its uptown swing-band connotations. In his many years as an A&R man for Columbia, Satherley discovered and recorded several artists who performed on the Grand Ole Opry and helped establish country music in Nashville. He also recorded Negro folksingers and blues artists and others who played what Columbia called race music. Satherley himself considered all of them country, Wills included, though he recognized that Wills's music was different from that of Nashville and the Southeast. Only if one defines country music broadly, to include every kind of American music with rural origins—blues, folk, cowboy, bluegrass, mountain, race, Spanish—could either Bob Wills or I agree that his music fits that category.

In 1973, Columbia released *The Bob Wills Anthology,* a reissue of recordings Wills cut between 1935 and 1947. The availability of these twenty-four selections has made it possible for scholars who are sensitive to musical styles to see what Wills and his musicians have always known—that there is a basic difference between Wills's music and that of Nashville and the Grand Ole Opry. In his album liner notes, William Ivey called Wills country in a broad sense: "Bob Wills remains one of the few great innovators in country music." Two sentences later, however, he wisely warned, "To fully appreciate Western Swing, the listener must erase from his mind every preconception concerning the nature and sound of country music he might entertain."[16] A San Francisco reviewer depicted the difference even more vividly: "Bob Wills invented western swing, which only remotely resembles country and western music as it is known today. Western swing combines country string band sounds with roaring horn sections borrowed from Dixieland and swing and smooth pop-type vocals as opposed to a nasal twang."[17]

While western swing and contemporary country music have rural roots—each borrowed heavily from folk tradition and used traditional stringed instruments—they developed into two distinct and different musics. Somewhere in their development they came to a fork in the road; one went one way and one the other. Perhaps it is more precise to say that the rural music that was finally popularized in Nashville remained east of the Mississippi, and the rural music that later influenced Wills moved on with the frontier west of the Mississippi. The music that was eventually centered in Nashville retained a good deal of its folk roots. Its purpose has generally been for the stage and for show, and it has therefore remained close to the ballad or story tradition of the southeastern section of the nation.[18]

The rural music basic to Bob Wills's style was, before the pioneers took

it from the Southeast to the Southwest, the same that developed into the country music of Nashville. However, the rural music of Jim Rob Wills's youth was different from that which remained in the Southeast. By the time Jim Rob began to play, it had evolved through more than a thousand miles of varied environments and several cultures. Negroes marked it not only in Louisiana and East Texas and other parts of the Deep South in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but also later, as the cotton culture moved to Jim Rob's West Texas. When this Anglo-Afro rural music met the Spanish in Texas in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, that culture added its stamp.[19] Finally, in Wills's case in particular, the western or ranching environment, with its emphasis on dancing, added another dimension. Jim Rob crossbred it again with black music in the cotton culture and, to a lesser extent, with Spanish folk music in New Mexico.[20]

Fiddling was the part of rural tradition that most influenced the Wills family. By the time Jim Rob learned to play, there was a Texas fiddle style that was different from its eastern counterparts.[21] Bob Wills took that style, learned blues and rhythmic patterns from the blacks, borrowed from Mexican musicians in New Mexico, added jazz, swing, and pop idioms to form what some people think was a *new music.* Merle Haggard, for instance, who has admired and studied Wills's music for years, recently made a tribute album, subtitled *My Salute to Bob Wills,* and wrote in the liner notes, "Very few musicians can be credited with creating a type of music, but the man to which this album is dedicated did just that. It is called Western Swing."[22]

Wills was as much an eclectic as he was a creator. His genius was his ability to blend the musics of his youth and his young manhood into a sound that had great popular appeal. At times, his music was not creative at all; it lacked any originality, especially when he was copying jazz and swing bands. In these cases, only his occasional folk yell distinguished his music from the music of those he was emulating.[23] Yet even during the short period when he could perform like the traditional swing bands, between 1939 and 1942, he was also playing music that at times sounded like what he had learned in West Texas between 1913 and 1929. He used instruments generally associated with rural and country music, and, in a continued effort to produce the sounds and swing of jazz and popular dance bands, blended them with reeds and brass and drums and piano. This was experimental, creative, and original; it was eclectic in that he was borrowing from both rural and urban musics. Much to Wills's chagrin, most of the swing bands he admired so much would never accept his musical hodgepodge and what to them was musical heresy. They called him a hillbilly and thought he was corny. They never could understand, and certainly never appreciated, how he could outdraw many of them and why his career lasted twenty-five years beyond the Swing Age. Of course, he

was not really a hillbilly, and he certainly did not play the kind of music the Grand Ole Opry and Nashville were making so popular. Both musically and geographically, he stood between the country music of Nashville and the Southeast and the swing bands of the West Coast.

If Wills was never part of the music world of Nashville, why was he elected to the Country Music Hall of Fame? Though Wills always said he "never played country music," the Country Music Association has fortunately been much more flexible in its definition than Wills himself ever was. More importantly, the CMA was aware that Bob Wills influenced the development of music in Nashville and the Southeast.[24]

There were many reasons for Wills's influence, which became progressively more important between 1940 and 1970. Though he used reeds, brass, and drums, it was his use of strings—the only instruments country artists used for many years—that impressed them. When country artists in the Southeast were looking for fresh ideas and styles in the 1930s and 1940s, Wills, in the West, was simply one of the few "outsiders" using their kind of instruments; so they borrowed from him and his musicians. Because his music was for dancing and not for show, as Nashville and Grand Ole Opry music was, he looked to different sources for ideas and inspiration, especially jazz and swing, which meant that country musicians, in turn, were influenced by these sources.

Above all, country musicians admired Wills's ability as a fiddler and copied his style as best they could. They heard his broadcasts as early as 1930; they heard his recordings, especially from late 1935 on, and perhaps as early as 1932; they were seeing him in the movies by 1940. By the late 1930s, he was one of the most famous fiddlers in the country, and some of his fiddle tunes had become standards wherever the instrument was played.[25] Nothing could have impressed country musicians more, for the fiddle was the first instrument ever used on WSM's Grand Ole Opry. In the past thirty years, country fiddlers have emulated the Wills style; since the late 1940s it has become especially popular in Nashville. For example, Hank Williams's fiddlers were often closer to western swing than to country fiddling.[26] More recently, some young fiddlers have emerged, Tommy Jackson, Gordon Terry, and Tommy Hill, to name a few, who can play the Bob Wills fiddle style almost as well as the master himself. Since the late 1960s, Johnny Gimble, who played in Wills's band for several years, has been a sideman in Nashville.

What has happened during the past thirty-five years is that more and more Nashville musicians, fiddlers in particular, have incorporated the Wills sound into the Nashville sound. They have borrowed not only the fiddle style, but also guitar, steel guitar, piano, and even drum styles. Wills and his musicians pioneered so much in string-band tradition that there is hardly an aspect of country music in general and Nashville in particular that they have not influenced.

If Bob Wills had done nothing but introduce drums into country music, he would deserve a high place in its history. When he first put them on the stage of the Ryman at his one and only Grand Ole Opry appearance, Opry officials considered cancelling his engagement because of such musical heresy.[27] Now, however, many bands at the Opry, as well as most of those in country music elsewhere, use drums. As the great guitarist Merle Travis acknowledged, "Bob put the beat in [country] music. Before Bob came along, there wasn't a definite rhythm section. He made it so that you could dance to it."[28]

That Wills played the leading role in giving country-and-western music a beat and making the forms danceable is well substantiated. What has not been recognized is the fact that his heavy beat and swinging rhythm put him in the tradition of the rockabillies who came out of country-and-western music. The beat of the rockabillies, according to Carl Belz, was lighter and quicker than that of rhythm-and-blues.[29] The similarity between Bob and the early rockabillies is obvious when one compares the recordings Wills made from the mid-1940s to the early 1950s, especially those with a good deal of jazz guitar work, with some early rockabilly classics such as Bill Haley and the Comets' "Rock around the Clock" and "Shake, Rattle and Roll."[30] In all these recordings, two-beat jazz and jazz choruses are basic. Besides this aural evidence, Haley's debt to western swing is also revealed in the fact that he was called Bill Haley and the Four Aces of Western Swing as late as July, 1948. Though Wills has been acknowledged as an important influence on commercial country music, he was often closer stylistically to some of the rockabillies, and he has never been properly credited with his early influence on that art form. John McEuen, a bluegrass-rock pioneer, sensed this influence: "In putting the swing back into country [music], Bob not only energized the form itself, but opened the door to the exploration of other possibilities as well—through the mutant of rockabilly to the core of what became rock and roll."[31] In their efforts to show Wills's impact on country music, scholars and enthusiasts alike have missed seeing that he was an important link between race music of the 1930s and 1940s and the rockabillies of the 1950s.

Historians of American music and future musicologists will probably debate whether Wills's major contribution to country-and-western music was the beat and rhythm he brought from blues and jazz or the old-time fiddle influence he brought from rural white music. Even his own musicians are undecided, as I am.[32]

Country artists in Nashville recorded Bob Wills's compositions as well as other selections he made popular. Their use of his repertory accounts in part for the mistaken idea that Wills's music and that from Nashville were one and the same. Fortunately for Wills, this notion became more widely held after World War II, giving him an even broader audience and

popularity. In turn, his influence on Nashville continued to grow in the postwar years. Above all, it endured because it had begun in the 1930s, at a time when country music was in its formative years. Despite the aloofness of Wills and his band from music in Nashville, their influence upon it has been profound and has played an important role in lifting its quality, contributing to its versatility, and broadening its horizons.[33] Tex Ritter, during his performance at "A Musical Tribute to the Immortal Bob Wills" in Fort Worth, March 6, 1972, summed up Wills's contributions: "When the Nashville Sound was born, Bob Wills was there."

Bob Wills was elected to the Country Music Hall of Fame for reasons beyond his musical contribution: he also helped bring respectability to country music. He did this inadvertently, when he recorded "New San Antonio Rose"—possibly the first time an artist from the western music field wrote and recorded a composition that became popular in all areas of American music except "serious" music.[34] Until then, the more "respectable" and popular artists had been aloof from country-and-western music. But they began to play and record "New San Antonio Rose," and many wondered for the first time if this music was not much more sophisticated than they had thought, much more than merely "hillbilly shrieks."[35] Since most people had lumped country music and western music together, they mistakenly assumed Wills was a traditional country musician. Thus it happened that Bob opened the way not only for western swing, but also for country music generally.

At its eighth annual awards dinner in Nashville, October 17, 1973, the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers gave Wills a special citation "for his long, productive, and creative association with country music—and his unequaled leadership as a musician and man." The day before the award was made, Bonnie Bourne of the Bourne Music Company in New York sent Wills a telegram which, though it no doubt gave Wills more credit than was due him, said a great deal concerning his peculiar contribution in popularizing country music: "Congratulations for the long overdue award which you are receiving tonight for your contribution to the Music World. You brought Nashville to New York with San Antonio Rose in 1940. Now Bourne joins its colleagues in returning the compliment by bringing New York to Nashville to do you honor."[36]

The difficult road to musical success that Wills traveled in the 1920s and thirties has made the way smoother for subsequent musicians. In short, when the Country Music Association voted Wills into the Country Music Hall of Fame, it was a vote of thanks to a pioneer musician who not only lifted himself with his musical achievements, but also helped lift the entire profession. Unfortunately, the CMA is one of the few cultural organizations that would dare honor men like Wills. Other honor-bestowing organizations are generally too snobbish to recognize genius

except in certain "polite" or "safe" areas. For example, Louis Armstrong, another musical pioneer, despite all the praise heaped on him before and after his death, was never elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, nor was he ever eligible for a Pulitzer Prize for music. He was never accepted as a part of "serious" American culture and music. This musical shallowness and cultural immaturity of the so-called cultural establishment shows that pioneers like Armstrong and Wills were too advanced to be fully appreciated in their own time.

Fortunately, Bob Wills *was* already appreciated by the people who were always most important to him, the common folk who listen to popular music. And he is assured of an important place in the history of American music. His influence will, of course, continue to be dominant in the music he created and made famous, western swing.[37] Ironically, however, with the decline of dancing in America, the future of Wills's music depends in part on country music in Nashville. When the CMA made him a member of the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1968, it not only stimulated an interest in the man and his music, it also introduced him to a new audience. For, with its proliferation on many radio and television stations, commercial country music has appealed to a far larger audience than Wills, even at his peak of popularity, would have ever dreamed.

Historian Bill Malone believes Wills's influence on country music will be as important in the future as it has been in the past. At "old fiddler's contests," Malone has discovered that the younger fiddlers, particularly, attempt to copy the Bob Wills style and play the tunes he made famous.[38] According to this same historian, Wills will continue to be important in country music not only for his fiddle style, but also for the "Bob Wills beat," his songs and tunes, and his instrumental and rhythmic styles.[39] Musical developments of recent years are in fact bearing out this prediction: currently, the Wills repertory and styles are being revitalized by artists ranging from Commander Cody, Charlie Daniels, Asleep at the Wheel, Willie Nelson, and Waylon Jennings to Richard Betts, Alvin Crow, James Talley, Merle Haggard, Vassar Clements, and Johnny Gimble.

The fact that between the 1940s and the 1970s Bob Wills played a role in the country music of Nashville and the Southeast means that the rural music with which he began his career has made a full cycle geographically. The music crossed the Mississippi and followed the frontier to West Texas. It underwent changes before it got there, and Wills embellished it in many ways before it was finally taken back to the Southeast, where it influenced country music in general and the Nashville sound in particular.

1. Betty Wills; Bob Wills.
2. Sam Gibbs Orchestra Service Datebook.
3. Ibid.

4. Betty Wills. Listen also to Betty's comments in *A Tribute to Bob,* United Artists SP-105.

5. Bob Wills.

6. Bonnie Bucy, "Awards Highlight Convention—Opry Anniversary Chalks Up Record," *Nashville Banner,* Oct. 19, 1968.

7. Ibid.; Betty Wills.

8. Betty Wills; Bucy, "Awards Highlight Convention."

9. Bucy, "Awards Highlight Convention." See also "Honor for Members," *ASCAP Today,* 3, no. 1 (June, 1969), 35; "Bob Wills to Hall of Fame," *Western News,* 1, no. 8 (Nov., 1968), 1; Pericles Alexander, "On with the Show," *Tulsa Daily World,* Oct. 15, 1968; "Newest Members of the Hall of Fame," *Country Song Roundup,* 21, no. 118 (May, 1969), 25–26.

10. Bucy, "Awards Highlight Convention."

11. Betty Wills.

12. Bob Wills.

13. Leon McAuliffe. See also the McAuliffe interview by Bill Littleton in "Nashville News," *International Musician,* Oct., 1973, p. 10.

14. See "Country Music's Future Worries Star [Chet Atkins]," *Dallas Morning News,* Aug. 22, 1974.

15. Arthur E. Satherley. In "Legendary Bob Wills—50 Years of County Music," *Country Music Reporter,* 1, no. 3 (May, 1970), 4–5, 8, a writer commented: "Bob never wanted his band to be called a hillbilly band. But called that it was by a lot of people. It certainly was a misnomer." This article is reprinted in *Country Music Reporter,* 2, no. 3 (Sept., 1971), 16–18. Also Bob Wills; Leon McAuliffe; Eldon Shamblin; Betty Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; Ray DeGeer; Laura Lee Owens; Joe Ferguson. See especially "Strictly by Ear," *Time,* Feb. 6, 1946, p. 50.

16. *The Bob Wills Anthology,* Columbia KG 32416. William Ivey is executive director of the Country Music Foundation. This album, in the tradition of Columbia's *The Bessie Smith Story* and *The Louis Armstrong Story,* complete with discographical data, is the most comprehensive and valuable album ever issued on Wills's music. Ivey reminds his readers that Wills's western swing is a distinct art form. He avoids the simplistic approach too often found in liner notes and writings on Wills's music of merely lumping it with country music. Wills and his musicians, however, would have rejected Ivey's idea that western swing is "one of the major substyles of the country music tradition." Western swing could just as well be considered a substyle of jazz, swing, or popular music. This is probably the question Columbia Records faced in the thirties and early forties—how to categorize Wills's music. And it is indeed beyond category. If by "substyles" Ivey meant "major influences on the country music tradition," then Wills, his musicians, and I would agree.

17. Joel Selvin, "Remember Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys," *San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle,* Oct. 14, 1973. Selvin's understanding of Wills's place in American popular music is rare and refreshing. The brief paragraph cited in the text shows more insight than most writing on the subject. See also Joel Selvin to Bob Wills, Oct. 17, 1973; Pete Kendall, "Sweet 'n' Hot—Bob Wills Has Returned on Two-Record Release," *Fort Worth Press,* Sept. 30, 1973.

18. Listen also to Leon McAuliffe.

19. Knocky Parker believed the Spanish influence on fiddle playing in the Southwest was significant in the fiddling Bob Wills learned as a boy. Listen to the Parker interviews at the John Edwards Memorial Foundation, UCLA (copies in the Archive of New Orleans Jazz, Tulane University).

20. Bob Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills; Eloise Wills House.

21. Listen, e.g., to *Texas Hoedown,* County 703; *Texas Farewell: Texas Fiddlers 1922–1930,* County 517; *Texas Fiddle Favorites,* County 707. Most recently, this style has been discussed by Linda C. Burman-Hall, "Southwestern American Folk Fiddle Styles," *Ethnomusicology,* 19, no. 1 (Jan., 1975), 47–65, and by Earl V. Spielman, "Traditional North American Fiddling: A Methodology for the Historical and Comparative Analytical Style Study of Instrumental Musical Traditions" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin at Madison, 1975), esp. pp. 261–266, 457–472.

22. Merle Haggard, *A Tribute to the Best Damn Fiddle Player in the World (or, My Salute to Bob Wills),* Capitol ST 638. When Haggard made this album, he did not play a single selection in his usual (mainstream country) style. He even used former members of Wills's band in order to make the selections sound as much like Wills as possible. It was a remarkably sensitive and successful performance.

23. Wills's band sounded no different from many first-rate swing bands of the time. Listen, e.g., to "I Found a Dream" and "Big Beaver," *The Bob Wills Anthology,* Columbia KG 32416; "Liebestraum," unissued Columbia master DAL 1168; "Maiden's Prayer," Okeh 06205; "The Girl I Left behind Me," unissued Columbia master DAL 1175; and "This Little Rosary," unissued Columbia master H 847.

24. Historian Bill Malone has learnedly demonstrated this influence. See especially his chapter "The Cowboy Image and the Growth of Western Music" in *Country Music, U.S.A.: A Fifty-Year History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), pp. 145–183, also pp. 193, 210, 280–281.

25. Ibid.

26. Listen, e.g., to *Hank Williams Greatest Hits,* MGM SE 3918.

27. Rip Ramsey; Bob Wills; Betty Wills; Laura Lee Owens.

28. Quoted in the liner notes to *Hall of Fame: Bob Wills and Tommy Duncan,* United Artists UAS 9963. Ernest Tubb told me essentially the same thing a few years ago.

29. Carl Belz, *The Story of Rock* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 25. See particularly the section called "The Country and Western Field" in Belz's chapter "The Beginnings of Rock: 1954–1956," pp. 23–25.

30. "Rock around the Clock" and "Shake, Rattle and Roll," Warner Brothers Seven Arts Records 7124. Listen especially to Haley and the Comets' "Blue Comet Blues," Decca 9–30085, and "Happy Baby" and "Dim, Dim the Lights," Decca 9–29317.

31. Jack Howard, "Philadelphia Patter," *Record Roundup,* 2, no. 7 (July, 1948), 5, showed that Haley was considered a western swing artist at the time. See John McEuen's liner notes to *Hall of Fame: Bob Wills and Tommy Duncan* and my interview with McEuen and other members of the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band after their 1972 concert at West Texas State University. During a 1973 recording session with Wills and his Texas Playboys in Dallas, Tommy Allsup told me of a conversation which indicates that Wills's influence on rock probably went beyond the C & W rockabillies: Fats Domino explained to him and Glynn Duncan at Harmony Park Ballroom in Anaheim, California, in 1960 that he had patterned his rhythm section after that of Bob Wills. See also Rick Ulman, "Hillbilly Jazz: A Background," brochure notes to *Hillbilly Jazz,* Flying Fish 101.

32. Sleepy Johnson; Al Stricklin; Ray DeGeer; Smokey Dacus; Leon McAuliffe; Bob Wills; Eldon Shamblin; Woodie Wood; Danny Alguire.

33. While Wills influenced music in Nashville, Nashville never influenced his western swing. He told me many times that he never played country music or considered his music country. During the research for this biography, Bob and I often borrowed tapes and records from each other. With one exception (Patsy Cline), he never asked for a country artist. He borrowed Bessie Smith, Emmett Miller, Louis Armstrong, Tommy Dorsey, Glenn Miller, Jelly Roll Morton, and the Original Dixieland Jazz Band.

34. See also Malone, *Country Music,* p. 249n26.

35. Ibid., pp. 193–197. Country-and-western musicians are, by and large, a very grateful and appreciative group of human beings, and many of them recognize and appreciate Wills's pioneer efforts. In a sense every country-and-western musician is indebted to Bob Wills for gaining more recognition and respectability for their music.

36. Bonnie Bourne to Bob Wills, Oct. 16, 1973. The award to Wills was the last one of the evening. Red O'Donnell wrote, "A sentimental touch was added to the program when Bob Wills, venerable Western swing fiddler, now confined to a wheel chair, was presented a special citation . . ." ("Foster, Rice Set Awards' Pace," *Nashville Banner,* Oct. 18, 1973). See also Jerry Bailey, " 'Bad Guys' Still Top Shooters at ASCAP Fete," *Tennessean* (Nashville), Oct. 18, 1973; "ASCAP to Fete Former Tulsa Songwriter—Bandleader Bob

Wills to Be Guest at Nashville Dinner," *Tulsa Daily World,* Oct. 11, 1973; "47 Songs Win ASCAP Awards; Bob Wills Given Special Citation," *Billboard,* Oct. 27, 1973, p. 4.

37. Linnell Gentry, e.g., refers to Wills as the Daddy of Western Swing in *A History and Encyclopedia of Country, Western, and Gospel Music* (Nashville: McQuiddy Press, 1961), p. 343. See also "Bob Wills Inventor of Westen Swing," *Billboard,* Feb., 26, 1972, p. 28.

38. Malone, *Country Music,* p. 181. See also *The Billboard 1944 Music Year Book,* pp. 346–347. There is even a good deal of interest in Wills in England. See Tony Byworth, "Bob Wills—The King of Western Swing," *Country Music People,* 2, no. 11 (Nov., 1971), 16–18; and Byworth to Wills, Jan. 2, 1972.

39. The Longines Symphonette Society, e.g., in 1973 released a long-play album called *Country Brass* (1B 300) and advertised it as that "new sound that is sweeping the country." Leon McAuliffe's statement in one of our interviews was more accurate historically: "That is just another area that Bob pioneered."

22

More Tributes to a Pioneer Musician

Whereas, The 61st Texas Legislature . . . salutes and congratulates its distinguished native son, James Robert "Bob" Wills. . . .

Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 50

Bob and Betty Wills and their children were elated when Bob was voted into the Country Music Hall of Fame. The ceremony in Nashville was later seen by millions on national television and undoubtedly inspired other tributes, honors, and celebrations for Wills. During his career, particularly in its latter years, he received tributes from all over the country—so many that his family finally had to request that some be canceled. The awards, plaques, and citations Wills received could have covered the walls of a large room.

Interestingly, "the [citation] that meant the most to him was the Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma," his wife declared. "I don't know why he always really wanted that one."[1] On December 20, 1968, Bob Wills was to be "honored for his contribution to America's Western music lore . . . during a ceremony at the National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center."[2] Bob took a band with him to the ceremony and played some of the music he had made famous. Then Hall officials presented him with a hat and a lifetime membership in the Hall of Fame and directed the signing of his name in concrete near the museum entrance. Outside the Oklahoma City area, few people knew of this ceremony. Why, then, did it mean so much to Bob? The answer lay in his feelings about the people and environment that were so vital in molding both him and his music. Bob grew up in the cattle and cowboy country of West Texas, played his first dances at ranches, grew to love the romance, horses, cattle, and ranch life in his formative years. Cowboys, cattlemen, and others in western America were his first and always among his most loyal admirers. His movies were nearly all westerns, and though they were replete with the excesses of Hollywood, Wills's love of horses, cattle, and the true cowboy life was

genuine. Especially as one of the founders of what today is called western music, Wills felt at home in the National Cowboy Hall of Fame.

Less than a week after he was voted into the Country Music Hall of Fame, Bob was back on the road, with a schedule that any man would have called strenuous. On October 24, 1968, he played a show in North Texas at the Whitesboro high school auditorium. From there he began a dance tour, playing Fort Sill on the twenty-fifth; Cain's in Tulsa, the twenty-sixth; Amarillo on the thirty-first; Dallas, November 2; Cliff, New Mexico, the ninth; Houston, the fifteenth; and Pasadena, Texas, the sixteenth. After two days in Fort Worth with his family, he left on a show tour: November 20, Municipal Auditorium, Fort Smith; the twenty-first, Convention Hall, Enid, Oklahoma; the twenty-second, Memorial Hall, Joplin; the twenty-third, Shrine Mosque, Springfield; the twenty-fourth, Memorial Hall, Kansas City, Kansas; the twenty-sixth, Municipal Auditorium, Sioux City; the twenty-seventh, Coliseum, Sioux Falls; the twenty-eighth, Music Hall, Topeka; and the thirtieth, Cotillion, Wichita.[3] On December 6, Wills was playing a dance in Fresno, California; on December 7 and 8 he was appearing at the Dream Bowl in Napa, California. He played for dancing in the evenings, and on one of the afternoons he appeared at a "Fiddlers' Get Together," where fiddlers from all over the West Coast performed. The whole affair was a homecoming for Wills and was called "the Big Bob Wills Party."[4] After Wills closed his engagement on the eighth, he caught the first flight to Fort Worth, visited a few hours with his family, and played at the Longhorn Ballroom (formerly the Bob Wills Ranch House) in Dallas the same night, December 9. He appeared for a show at a high school in Duncan, Oklahoma, on the fourteenth; on the eighteenth, he was in Mineral Wells, Texas; the twentieth, Oklahoma City; the twenty-first, Cain's in Tulsa; and the twenty-third, Houston. His family could not believe it, but he got home on Christmas Eve and spent Christmas with Betty and the children.[5] On December 27, he played a dance at Fort Hood and on the twenty-eighth, one in Houston; he played New Year's Eve in Amarillo to end his fifty-fourth and begin his fifty-fifth year in show business as a fiddler.[6] As arduous as it appears, this was Wills's schedule after he "slowed down." He would be sixty-four in a little more than two months.

Bob still loved to play, to express himself in his music, and to enjoy his audiences. Yet he often wondered if he would have to keep up that pace forever. His obligations seemed to demand it. Two of his children were still at home. Carolyn was studying at the University of Tulsa, soon to complete her degree in elementary education. Cindy was ready for her first year in high school. Diane was married to a fine young man and became a mother before the year 1969 ended. James Robert II was married, with two children.[7] Bob also sent a check each month to help support his mother,

then in her eighties, and two of his sisters. He had saved some money, but felt he needed to work a few more years.[8] Since the early 1930s he had been on the road almost continuously. Would he ever get to quit? He was not ready to, though he was tired. The end, nevertheless, was near, and neither he nor his beloved Betty was aware of it.

With one day off at New Year's, Wills was back on the road January 2 playing one-nighters. His old friend, Sam Gibbs, had scattered bookings for Wills throughout 1969 and had almost full bookings (as many dates as Wills would take) through June. It promised to be another good year for Bob. His first engagement was a dance on Thursday, January 2, at the Sheriff's Posse Barn in Odessa, Texas. All his engagements in January and February were in Texas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana.[9]

On February 19, 20, and 21, 1969, Bob Wills had his final recording session for Kapp Records in Nashville.[10] He appropriately paid tribute to the famous rural fiddle bands, recording Milton Brown's "My Mary" and "Talkin' 'bout You," Leon McAuliffe's "Panhandle Rag," Spade Cooley's "Shame on You," and Pee Wee King's "Slow Poke." He also recorded a blues selection that Johnnie Lee Wills and his band helped make popular, Kokomo Arnold's "Milk Cow Blues." It was the basic blues form Bob loved, and the recording is a good example of his facility with the blues idiom in his own music. "Brown Skin Gal," the last item in that session, was the last recording Wills ever made as a fiddler.[11] This selection was, fittingly, an old-time fiddle tune with the beat and rhythm of blues and jazz. It revealed that Bob had not gotten very far away from the folk music he learned from his family and from blacks in the cotton fields and cotton camps of East and West Texas.

The week of his sixty-fourth birthday, the first week in March, Bob played Cain's Academy in Tulsa and the Diamond Entertainment Center in Oklahoma City. Both establishments held birthday parties in his honor. There was nearly always this folksiness about a Bob Wills dance, something of a family affair. Even in the big ballrooms of the Southwest, Middle West, and West Coast, with several hundred or several thousand in attendance, the atmosphere resembled that of a ranch dance in West Texas, where Wills began his career. People usually felt free to walk up to the bandstand and call him Bob and ask him to play a certain tune just as they would have at a country dance.[12] In Tulsa, Ada and Alvin Perry provided a three-tiered cake that would serve 750 guests. Bob symbolically cut the cake with his fiddle bow and told the audience, "I'm on a diet, so all of you folks just come up and help yourselves to a piece of the cake." He smoked a cigar while they ate the cake, and then he said, "I'm here to do the only thing I know to do."[13] He counted off "one, two, three, four," stomping his boot-heel on each count, and began playing Bennie Moten's "South." The crowd did the only thing *they* knew to do when Bob Wills played. They

danced. It had been fifty-four years since Jim Rob played his first dance at age ten in West Texas.

From Cain's Academy, Bob and the band continued their tour to San Antonio, where, according to *Western News,* they performed to packed houses at the Farmer's Daughter.[14] By the end of March, Wills and his band were playing in California: Saturday, March 22, Sutter Corral, Sutter; Sunday, Ricardos, Redding; Monday, Circle Star, San Carlos; Wednesday, Outpost Club, Sacramento; Friday, Red Barn, San Jose; Sunday the thirtieth, Anaheim Convention, Anaheim.[15] A review of the tour in the May issue of *Western News* told about the band Wills was working with, Tag Lambert and the Western Swing Boys. It described the fiddle work of Wills, Red and Bob Barnes, the vocal work of Lambert and Al Palmer, and the clarinet and saxophone work of Jack Lloyd. The reviewer noted that the most requested songs on the tour were "In the Mood," "Maiden's Prayer," and "Let's Ride with Bob." Wills and the band drew good crowds, and the response was so enthusiastic they were booked back for a California tour in July, 1969.[16]

Western News printed a picture of Wills and Lambert with the caption "Bob and Tag say goodbye to the West until July."[17] If the editors had taken a careful look at their pictures of Wills, they might have suspected something was seriously wrong with him. Perhaps they did, but thought he was just not feeling so well as usual or was tired because of the tour. Nothing serious. Something *was* seriously wrong, however, and he never returned to California as a musician.

Less than two months after he returned home to Fort Worth, Wills had a stroke that meant he would never play again. His wife believed he may have had a minor stroke in February of 1969 before he left on his cross-country tour to California.[18] She began to notice that he had no energy; he tired very easily. His personality changed, and he said very little to her and the children. He continued to take her out to dinner as he always had, but while they ate he stared and said little or nothing. He knew something was wrong, but attributed it to being tired or worried. Until his stroke in May of 1969, he was still traveling all over the country, even to New York City, where he had an extended engagement at the Taft Hotel. By late April and early May his condition had gotten worse. "He couldn't remember names or tunes," Betty said. "He would call one tune to the band, say 'South,' and begin a different tune."[19] Wills went to Tulsa for a dance shortly before his stroke in May. Without saying anything to Bob, Eldon Shamblin just went up to Cain's and set up his guitar and returned that night to play. Wills was glad to see an old Texas Playboy on the bandstand. He smiled at Shamblin and went to work. "Bob came out to play, but he couldn't play. I knew something was wrong. He had lost his coordination," Shamblin said. "I was glad I went. I knew that night it would be the last time I would ever play with him."[20]

On May 30, 1969, Bob Wills made his last public appearance before his stroke. On that occasion he was honored by Governor Preston Smith and the State of Texas. Wills appeared before both the Texas House and Senate and was given special recognition for his contribution to American music. Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 50 reads in part as follows:

> *Whereas,* The 61st Texas Legislature . . . salutes and congratulates its distinguished native son, James Robert "Bob" Wills; and . . .
> *Whereas,* On October 18, 1968, Bob Wills was elected to membership in the Country Music Hall of Fame, one of only seven persons ever so elected . . . this high honor being bestowed upon Bob Wills for his leadership in and his contributions to the field of country and western music; and
> *Whereas,* For over 30 years, Bob Wills has been the leader in writing and performing western swing music and is regarded by his professional peers as primarily responsible for the popularity of western swing music; and
> *Whereas,* Bob Wills' love for his native state of Texas has always been prominently identified in his music, in the name of his band, the famed Texas Playboys, in the songs he has written and those he has popularized, including "San Antonio Rose," "A Maiden's Prayer," "My Confession," "Home in San Antone," and many others; and . . . be it
> *Resolved,* That he be invited to appear before the Legislature to receive in person a copy of this Resolution from the hand of the Governor of Texas.[21]

Just how "A Maiden's Prayer" and "My Confession" can be specifically identified with Texas is uncertain; nevertheless, this resolution was appropriate because Wills's music is among the only original music Texas and the Southwest have produced. Eight months later the Oklahoma legislature passed a similar resolution.[22] But it was too late for Wills to appreciate it, at least for many months.

Sam Gibbs and Harvey Frazier drove Wills back to Fort Worth after the ceremonies in Austin. Bob slept most of the way home, arriving there about 7:30 P.M.[23] When Betty asked him if he was hungry, he replied, "No, just tired. Let me rest." Later he woke up, ate his dinner, and then went to bed early. The next morning he had a stroke shortly after he got out of bed. He called his wife and said, "I can't see. I mean I'm seeing two of everything."[24] Betty called their doctor in Tulsa and told him she was bringing Bob to the hospital there. In thirty minutes she had made him comfortable in the car and was on the road. Three hours and forty minutes later she was in Tulsa. The doctors were waiting at Hillcrest Hospital, and in half an hour Wills was in his room. His right side was paralyzed. The doctors diagnosed his stroke as a 70 percent blockage and advised an immediate operation. They discovered cholesterol deposits all through his brain, and the operation revealed a 90 percent blockage. The doctors operated again to remove a blood clot. Wills was in Hillcrest Hospital from May until July, 1969. He returned to Fort Worth in October and "did pretty well until December and took pneumonia." In the latter part of

January, 1970, he was down to 117 pounds. Betty had to stop his therapy "because he didn't have the strength to stand." She took him back to the Tulsa doctors in June and finally took him home in November, 1970. In April, 1971, the doctors said Wills absolutely had to have a kidney operation. "Four or five hours after the operation, he had a stroke on the left side," Betty Wills recalled. She still tried to strengthen him by exercising him and trying to help him walk. "After two or three hard falls, we had to give it up."[25]

For some months after these strokes, Wills could remember very little; he quit listening to music of any kind and showed no interest in it. Fortunately, this was only temporary. In 1971, he began to return to normal. Though he was paralyzed on the right side, he got all the use of the left side back. His mind was alert again, and his speech, although impaired for many months, was much improved.[26] His memory of incidents in the early years of his career was remarkable. Above all, the spirit that had enabled him to leave the cotton fields and, against great odds, pioneer a new music was still there. He even vowed he would play again.

Unfortunately, Bob Wills was wrong. Nevertheless, he could look back over an amazingly long and successful career. Years before his forced retirement, he became the idol of many young musicians across the nation. He became a legend in his own time. The legend has, in some cases, fostered myths that continue to distort the truth about his life. Though most of the "Bob Wills stories" are laudatory, Wills, his wife, and his sisters and brothers helped keep them out of this biography. One example will suffice to show how this mythology, usually with some basis in fact, has grown.

Musicians have learned through the professional grapevine how Wills demanded that all his musicians watch him constantly and be ready for a jazz chorus any time he pointed his violin bow at them. The story is now told in Nashville and elsewhere of a young steel guitar player who had just gone to work for Wills and, the first time Wills called on him to take a chorus, could not play because of a faulty connection in his amplifier. Wills is supposed to have explained to him the necessity of being ready to play something new and spectacular when he took a chorus. This part of the story is probably factual. But as the story goes, the next time Wills gave the chorus to the young musician, his amplifier failed again, and in an effort to do something spectacular he kicked his guitar off the bandstand and asked, "Was this spectacular enough for you, Mr. Wills?"[27] One cannot help wondering what sort of mythology is growing up around Bob since his death, if stories such as this circulated during his lifetime.

Another story that has found its way into newspapers and periodicals concerns Wills's "gold records." One piece of propaganda listed ten Wills recordings as all one-million-sellers. The fact is that Wills won only one

At a recording session for Liberty, Los Angeles, 1960. *Left to right:* Tommy Duncan, Bob Wills, unidentified man. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

The Bob Wills show at the Golden Nugget, Las Vegas, Nevada, 1961. *Left to right:* Gene Crownover (steel guitar), Glenn Rhees (saxophone), Bob Wills (fiddle and vocals), Tommy Duncan (vocals), Wade Peeler (drums), Jack Lloyd (clarinet), Luke Wills (bass), Leon Rausch (guitar). *(Courtesy Glenn Rhees)*

Bob Wills in the mid-1960s, with Paul Cohen (producer for some of his recording sessions) and Sam Gibbs (his manager). *(Courtesy Sam Gibbs Orchestra Service)*

Dewey Groom (left) and Bob Wills appearing as guests of Billy Gray (right) on the television show "Music Country Style" in the mid-1960s. *(Courtesy Keith Kolby)*

Bob Wills with Leon Rausch and the Texas Playboys, 1964. *Left to right:* Leon Rausch (guitar), Jimmy Belken (fiddle), Bob Wills (fiddle), Johnny Manson (fiddle), unidentified guitarist, Albert Talley (steel guitar). *(Courtesy Leon Rausch)*

Bob Wills with the winning trainer and jockey at a race in Wills's honor at Ruidosa, New Mexico, 1965. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

Induction into the Country Music Hall of Fame, October 18, 1968. *Left to right:* Tex Ritter, Bob Wills, Roy Acuff. *(Photo by Bill Grine; courtesy Country Music Foundation Library and Media Center, Nashville, Tennessee)*

Bob Wills beside the plaque marking his election to the Country Music Hall of Fame. *(Photo by Bill Goodman; courtesy Country Music Foundation Library and Media Center, Nashville, Tennessee)*

Recording for Kapp, February 21, 1969. In this photograph Wills is playing "Brown Skin Gal," the last recording he made as a fiddler. *Left to right:* Tommy Jackson, Johnny Gimble, Bob Wills. *(Courtesy Paul Bowling)*

Bob Wills honored by the governor of Texas for his contribution to American music, May 30, 1969. *Left to right:* Senator Jack Hightower, Governor Preston Smith, Bob Wills. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

Bob Wills thanks a joint session of the Texas legislature for the resolution they passed regarding his contribution to American music, May 30, 1969. *Foreground, left to right:* Senator Jack Hightower, Bob Wills; *background:* unidentified senators and representatives. *(Courtesy Congressman Jack Hightower)*

Bob Wills holding the resolution passed by the Texas legislature. *Left to right:* Tex Ritter, unidentified man, Governor Preston Smith, Bob Wills, unidentified man. *(Courtesy Governor Preston Smith)*

gold record. His records sold in the millions, but only "San Antonio Rose" found a place among the select and exclusive company of million-sellers.[28]

Without the help of myths and exaggerated stories, Bob had a remarkable career on which to reflect. Besides sales of his own recordings, other musicians sold millions of recordings of his compositions. He made nearly twenty films, for Monogram, Columbia, Warner Brothers, Universal Pictures, and MGM. Few dance bands in American history have matched his longevity and his attraction at the box office. Even when most of the big swing bands Wills so greatly admired had gone out of existence, he was still popular. Few bandleaders in the Swing Age made more money than he did. If making money is an indication of success, Wills had more than his share. But if keeping the money is the standard of success, Wills was not too successful.

Actually, money was never an end in itself for Bob Wills. This is probably the main reason that at the end of his career he did not have much of the fortune he had made. Like most movie stars and show-business personalities, he spent (or wasted) a great deal of it. He also made some bad investments, such as the Bob Wills Ranch House in Dallas and Wills Point in California. But members of his band and his first manager, men who knew him for more than thirty or forty years, all said he had a "big heart" and simply gave away a good part of his wealth.[29] Even after his stroke, as he lay partially paralyzed, he sent his mother a check every month for the rest of her life. Neither Wills nor his wife ever mentioned this to me; the information came from Bob's two sisters, who cared for his mother.[30] He also signed over the royalties from "Faded Love" (one of his most lucrative compositions) to his mother because John Wills had helped him write it and, above all, Bob wanted to make certain his mother had some income as long as she lived.[31] Another reason Wills did not leave the profession a rich man was that he placed "too much trust in his fellow man," and some of his fellow men took advantage of him.[32] Reared in West Texas, where a man's word was expected to be his bond, he was never one to insist on a written contract. The stories of the way he helped people and gave them money and gifts are all well documented and need not be reiterated here. Johnnie Lee Wills remarked recently that if Wills had just half of what he gave to the poor, he would be rich.[33]

As far as Bob Wills was concerned, he was rich in the things that were really important to him. Rich in musical memories. Rich in friends. This doubtless sounds too romantic, if not downright naive, for an age in which the criterion for success is the amount of money one makes and keeps. This was never Bob Wills's philosophy; he believed friends were more important than money.[34] And his friends came through. While cynics and "realists" scoffed at Wills's trust in his fellow man, he saw his philosophy and acts of humanitarianism vindicated less than a year after his tragic

stroke. When artists from all over America assembled in Tulsa to appear at the mammoth Bob Wills Benefit Show, and when reservations from friends and fans came in from all over the Middle West, the *Tulsa Daily World* commented: "Bob made oodles of money during his 50 years in show business. Now, for various reasons, it is gone. He made a wagon train load of friends during the half century, too. They are not gone."[35]

The "wagon train load of friends" was not gone. As for Wills's wealth, the paper could not comment on that with any accuracy. He was, in fact, living quite comfortably. The amazing thing was that his friends and fans did not know whether or not he needed their help. However, they were taking no chances. They did know Bob had befriended some of them and many others, and if he *did* need help, they wanted to make certain he received it.[36] If he did not, it was still a way of paying tribute to a man whose long career had apparently ended.

The Bob Wills Benefit Show was set for January 18, 1970. Almost eighty stars agreed to pay their own expenses and appear free of charge.[37] However, on that Sunday, it was seven degrees in Tulsa, and the night before, about four inches of snow had fallen on streets that were already covered with ice. Stars began to call from Hollywood, Nashville, New York City, Miami, and across the country saying they would be there if they could get a flight.[38] Enough performers were already in Tulsa to have a show; others made it there one way or another. Some landed in Amarillo or Wichita or Dallas and drove in over dangerous roads.[39] Three of the six living members of the Country Music Hall of Fame, Roy Acuff, Ernest Tubb, and Tex Ritter, were there to pay tribute to a fourth. All of them feared the crowd simply could not get to the Fairgrounds Pavilion. Eldon and Ruby Shamblin, the principal promoters of the benefit, had the same fear. The *Tulsa Daily World* reported, "One downtown church with a nationally-known guest speaker had only about 50 at an early service and less than 200 at the second service. The minister of that church commented that his guest delivered messages 'that rang notes of challenge through our almost empty sanctuaries.' "[40] Another clergyman who had a "record low of 33" in his morning service advised his parishioners not to get out, "that it was better for others not to take the risk of automobile accidents or broken bones."[41] Little wonder the Shamblins and others thought the benefit was doomed.

However, by 1:00 P.M., Ruby Shamblin recalled, "there must have been one thousand people standing around" at the Fairgrounds Pavilion, and the first show was not scheduled to begin until 4:00 P.M.[42] "An estimated 5,000 people were there by 2:30 P.M. and more were crowding the turnstiles," a Tulsa newspaper reported.[43] Eight thousand people filled the Pavilion for the first show, and others were turned away. Another big crowd returned at 7:45 P.M. for the second show. "If Bob

Wills' name wasn't on this show, we wouldn't have drawn worth a darn," Roy Acuff said. When Ernest Tubb saw the size of the crowd that had come in that weather, he said to Eldon Shamblin, "I just can't understand it." Shamblin answered. "I can. Probably 50 percent of the people out here tonight Bob has helped and they are trying to thank him."[44]

The wagon train load of old friends, musicians, and fans paid tribute to Wills that bleak day in January. Gate receipts were nearly $27,000. The Shamblins kept expenses to a mere $2,217, of which $1,125 was for rental of the Fairgrounds Pavilion. The rest went for taxes, advertising, and electrical crews. Eldon Shamblin and his wife took their old boss a check for $24,000 and a tape of the nine-hour program.[45] Chill Wills (no relation), who had flown to Dallas and driven to Tulsa to appear on the show, called it a "barn raisin'. It's a good testimonial to Bob. I think it's a great thing. We came and gave away what we have to sell."[46]

When the clergymen of Tulsa learned of the turnout for Bob Wills, one Episcopalian complained that "people will get to where they want to go."[47] A Methodist minister noted, "While several churches . . . closed their doors last Sunday due to the inclement weather, 11,000 people braved the cold, the snow and ice-covered roads to spend $30,000 to honor a man!" He said he was not belittling Bob Wills but added, "Believe me, it is a reflection on the people who could not find time to come and worship God, but could find time and money to honor a man. . . . Let me say," he concluded, "I think it tremendous how the western musicians and entertainers hang together. I have had occasion to see them in action several times lately. It is a shame Christians can't be more like them when it comes to love, charity, happiness, and togetherness."[48] With this same spirit the minister so admired in Tulsa, other benefits were held for Bob Wills across the nation.[49]

During the nearly sixty years Wills was in show business, many accolades and honors were bestowed on him. The Oklahoma legislature passed a resolution honoring him on the eve of the Tulsa benefit.[50] In April, 1970, Wills was elected a Pioneer Member of Country Western Music in Los Angeles.[51] Wills was proud that the governor and legislature of his home state and various academies and associations had recognized his achievements, but he was just as appreciative of the honor and admiration that came to him from the common people, such as those who braved the weather to attend the benefit in Tulsa. A tribute Wills never forgot was the organizing of the Bob Wills Night Club of the Air in Iron River, Wisconsin. Between 1938 and 1942, members of the Night Club met every Thursday night at one of their homes and listened to Wills and the Texas Playboys broadcast from Cain's Academy.[52] Eldon Shamblin remembered when "a bunch of people up in Wisconsin . . . chartered a rail coach and came to Tulsa. Just to a dance. Can you imagine it? And I can remember

when we were on the road. Families would write in and get our schedule and then plan their vacation and then follow us from town to town during their entire vacation."[53] These were the common people Wills loved to entertain. His music was always for them rather than for the artist.[54]

Still, artists have often been among Wills's most admiring fans, and many have honored him in their own music. Ray Price, for instance, recorded an album of selections Wills either composed or made famous.[55] Leon McAuliffe honored his old boss on national television (the Jimmy Dean show) by playing a special rendition of "Faded Love."[56] Tompall, the Glaser Brothers, and McAuliffe later recorded "Faded Love" and briefly traced Wills's music from a lonesome, solitary fiddle to a fiddle-and-guitar duet, finally to the "biggest and most famous western dance band in the whole world—Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys."[57] In 1970, Starday-King Records released an album entitled *The Bob Wills Story,* with some of the most famous selections Wills wrote and made popular. The final song, written by Gene Henslee, was "Life to Legend: A Tribute to Bob Wills."[58] In the spring of 1970, Merle Haggard recorded an album of Bob Wills music, using some of the Texas Playboys who had played on Bob's original recordings. This LP by a young fellow artist, *A Tribute to the Best Damn Fiddle Player in the World,* is a particularly rare, bold, and admirable salute to a pioneer musician and composer.[59]

When Haggard cut this tribute album, Wills was not present, because of his stroke the year before. Haggard wanted to see Bob back with his Texas Playboys one more time. By the fall of 1971, Wills was strong enough to make a trip to Haggard's ranch near Bakersfield, California. Without telling them that Wills would be there, Haggard arranged to fly ten former Texas Playboys and their wives to Bakersfield, ostensibly for a recording session for Capitol. There *was* a recording session, but the main purpose was a Bob Wills–Texas Playboy reunion. When the "boys," some of them now in their sixties, arrived, they embraced each other and soon began talking about old times. Al Stricklin: "If it had not been for Merle, some of us would never have seen each other again. I had not seen some of the boys in thirty years. The last time I saw Alex [Brashear], his mustache was brown. Now he's gray."[60]

Johnnie Lee Wills was to play tenor banjo the next day in the recording session; Leon McAuliffe, steel guitar; Smokey Dacus, drums; Al Stricklin, piano; Eldon Shamblin, electric guitar; Luke Wills, bass; Joe Holley, violin; Alex Brashear, trumpet; Tiny Moore, electric mandolin; and Johnny Gimble was to play Bob Wills's violin parts. All of these musicians except Tiny Moore and Johnny Gimble had played in the great prewar Texas Playboy orchestra. Many of them had been in the earliest Tulsa band, in 1934 and 1935. Some were key musicians who helped make

the Texas Playboys famous. Several of the best of the old Playboys were missing. The most obvious omission was Tommy Duncan, who had died of a heart attack in 1967.[61] Haggard got the nearest thing; he flew in Tommy's younger brother, Glynn Duncan, to do the vocals. After the boys had a little reunion, Haggard took them aside one by one and said, "There's someone I want you to see." Al Stricklin said Haggard took him into a bedroom, "and there on a bed lay Bob Wills. . . . Bob held up that good hand and pulled me down to him. After we cried a little, we visited about thirty minutes."[62] Each of the Texas Playboys got to visit with Bob. Then, after a grand celebration feast, the boys went to their motel in Bakersfield, where they had a big party and talked about the glory years in Tulsa.[63]

The next morning the musicians assembled beside Merle and Bonnie Haggard's swimming pool for a historic recording session. Capitol Records brought its recording equipment to the ranch. Smokey Dacus said, "Each one of us had a separate microphone. I had two. That's more than all of us had in the thirties."[64] Everything was ready for the session—except one thing. And not a note was played until Betty Wills rolled Bob out in his wheelchair, complete with white hat and cowboy boots. He asked her to get his fiddle, and though his bow hand was paralyzed, he held his fiddle before his Texas Playboys once again as he had thousands of times. Al Stricklin: "I was watching Bob, expecting him to say something to me. It was like old times, but all he could do was smile at me. But his smile was more inspiration. Just sitting there knowing he was there, I think we did better because he was there." Smokey Dacus: "We didn't talk about Bob being sick. Bob was sitting there in front in a wheelchair. But I didn't see the wheelchair, I just wasn't aware of the wheelchair. He was there. He was in front of us."[65]

Haggard suggested they do the first selection they recorded in their first session together in Dallas in 1935.[66] Someone remembered it was "Osage Stomp," an old jazz or race selection. Bob had always begun "Osage Stomp" with his fiddle and handled the sudden breaks which that tune required. Without him, they had difficulty and had to begin it three times. They had trouble on only two other pieces. Beyond that their nine-hour session proceeded smoothly; they played all the old songs together just as if they were back in the thirties. "That's how deep they were imbedded in us," Smokey Dacus said. Bob pulled Betty down to him (he could only whisper at the time) and told them to play "Twin Guitar Special,"[67] a tune Leon McAuliffe and Eldon Shamblin had written and played together. Leon recalled they had not done it in twenty-five years; but they played it "note to note together."[68] "At Bakersfield," Dacus said, "I knew what triggered Al. . . . So Al takes a chorus, and I'm lying back in under Al, and immediately he looked around there at me. He knew. And I laid a beat under

him that built that fire under him. He looked back, and it was thirty years since we played together."[69] They were the same old Texas Playboys, each trying to make the other fellow play over his head.

The Playboys recorded "San Antonio Rose," "Steel Guitar Rag," and many others. "Bob sat there and looked at one, then the other of us," Stricklin said. Wills was still so musically sensitive that he frowned as they played two selections. Joe Holley stopped the band and went down to him. "Bob, what's wrong?" Wills pointed out they were not playing it as they once did. He explained what was wrong, and the boys then remembered. Later in the session Haggard went to Wills and asked, "Bob, how does it sound?" Wills said, "It lacks only one thing." "What's that?" "Me." The old fire was there; the body was weak, but the desire to play was as strong as ever.[70]

Merle Haggard had helped his own idol achieve a little bit of a dream. When Haggard was a little boy, he rode his bicycle to Bob's dances in Bakersfield, and because he did not have the money to buy a ticket, he would sit in a window and listen to Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys.[71] In 1971 he was privileged to help Bob bring his boys together for a reunion like Wills always said he wanted when they retired. As the Playboys left Haggard's home the evening of September 29, they wondered if they would ever play together again—and if they would ever see the "old man" alive again.

1. Betty Wills; Bob Wills. Bob would have been just as pleased had he known that on May 3, 1975, his final recording, *For the Last Time* (United Artists UA-LA216-J2), became the first album ever placed in the National Cowboy Hall of Fame.

2. See especially Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook.

3. Sam Gibbs Orchestra Service Datebook.

4. "Bob Wills," *Western News,* 1, no. 9 (Dec., 1968), 1; Joe Holley; Alex Brashear; Gene Barnard.

5. Betty Wills; Sam Gibbs.

6. Sam Gibbs Orchestra Service Datebook.

7. Diane Wills Arnold; Betty Wills; Bob Wills; Cindy Wills James, field notes; Carolyn Wills Johnson; James Robert Wills II; Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook.

8. Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House; Johnnie Lee Wills; Sam Gibbs.

9. Sam Gibbs Orchestra Service Datebook.

10. Bob Wills; Betty Wills. Kapp later released an album called *Mel Tillis and Bob Wills,* Kapp KS 3639, which Wills had absolutely nothing to do with. He was not even present when it was recorded.

11. See Kapp Records artist's cards for Wills, 1965–69; Bob Wills (Paul Bowling interview).

12. I observed this at many of Wills's dances and heard it recounted by fans in countless interviews. His musicians also corroborated this atmosphere. Wayne Piquet, in "How a Catoosan Remembers the Great Bob Wills," *Times-Herald* (Catoosa, Okla.), July 5, 1973, wrote: "Bob was just as common as anyone. My wife would go up and Bob would kiss her on the cheek before nearly every dance of his we attended." See especially Pete Kendall, "An Old Friend Talks about F W Band Leader Bob Wills," *Fort Worth Press,* Sept. 24, 1972.

13. These birthday parties for Wills were held almost every year beginning in the early 1960s. See especially Ada Perry Scrapbook. Also Ada Perry; Alvin Perry; Bob and Betty Wills

Scrapbook; Alvin Perry to Glenn P. White, Jan. 17, 1967. Concerning the plans for a party at Cain's Academy on Wills's sixty-fourth birthday, see Tony Solow, "King Turning 64—Foot-Pattin' Party Planned for Bob Wills," *Tulsa Tribune,* Feb. 26, 1969; "Bob Wills Back in Tulsa for 64th Birthday Fete," *Tulsa Daily World,* Mar. 2, 1969.

14. "Calif. Welcomes Bob Wills in March: Mr. Bob Wills Western News Personality of the Month," *Western News* 1, no. 12 (Mar., 1969), 1; "Bob Wills Performs to Packed House in San Antonio, Texas—The 'King' of Western Swing to Tour Calif. in Late March," ibid., p. 10. Wills played for the sixth anniversary celebration of the Farmer's Daughter in San Antonio the year before; see "Bob Wills," *KBUC Country,* Jan., 1968, pp. 2, 3, 22.

15. Sam Gibbs Orchestra Datebook.

16. "Review: Bob Wills Tour in March—To Return in July," *Western News,* 2, no. 2 (May, 1969), 3, 19, 22.

17. Ibid., p. 22.

18. Betty Wills.

19. Ibid.

20. Eldon Shamblin; Joe Andrews.

21. Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 50. See also House Resolution No. 515 and News Release, Office of Governor Preston Smith, May 28, 1969.

22. Enrolled House Resolution No. 1057.

23. Sam Gibbs.

24. Betty Wills.

25. Ibid.

26. See Jack Gordon, "A Visit with Bob Wills, Ill but Smiling," *Fort Worth Press,* May 3, 1971; Gloria Denko, "Member of Medicare Generation—Flower Has Wilted for Texas Playboy," *Amarillo Sunday News-Globe,* May 24, 1970.

27. I am indebted to members of the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band for this and other "Bob Wills stories" they heard in Nashville and elsewhere. Wherever they go, they said, they hear Wills discussed. According to Laura Lee Owens, Les Anderson once told Bob that he could not take a chorus when Bob called on him. Bob said, "When I call on you, don't tell me you can't do something. If you can't do something, kick your guitar off the bandstand. But do something." This is probably the way this myth began. This same anecdote appeared in Jerry Zolten, "Western Swingtime Music: A Cool Breeze in the American Desert," *Sing Out!,* 23, no. 2 (May–June, 1974), 5.

28. Betty Wills. Another myth, that "San Antonio Rose" was recorded in the Blackstone Hotel in Fort Worth, was proliferated by a great admirer of Wills, Gene Henslee, when he included it in a song he wrote, "Life to Legend: A Tribute to Bob Wills," on *The Bob Wills Story,* Starday SLP 469. See also Jack Gordon, "A Visit with Bob Wills," *Fort Worth Press,* May 3, 1971. There is no evidence that Wills ever recorded in Fort Worth for Columbia (see the Discography). The owner of the Blackstone Hotel has planned to place a bronze plaque on the corner of the hotel to commemorate this "historic" recording. J. B. Walling, field notes.

29. Smokey Dacus; Sleepy Johnson; Leon McAuliffe; Eldon Shamblin; O. W. Mayo; Betty Wills.

30. Ruby Wills Sullivan; Eloise Wills House. Emmaline Wills died in June, 1972.

31. Ibid.; Johnnie Lee Wills; Betty Wills; Son Lansford.

32. O. W. Mayo.

33. Johnnie Lee Wills.

34. Betty Wills. Every member of the band agreed with this statement. Listen especially to Smokey Dacus; Eldon Shamblin; O. W. Mayo; Al Stricklin; Ada Perry.

35. Wayne Mason, "Bob Wills Benefit Due Cast of 60," *Tulsa Daily World,* Jan. 12, 1970.

36. Ruby Shamblin, field notes. Ruby and her husband, Eldon, conceived the idea for the Bob Wills benefit.

37. Joe Newman, "Former Okmulgeean Spearheads Musical Tribute to Bob Wills," *Daily Times* (Okmulgee, Okla.), Jan. 13, 1970; "C & W Stars Paying Tribute to Bob Wills," *Arizona Republic,* Jan. 9, 1970; "Musical Tribute Sunday," *Daily Oklahoman,* Jan. 9, 1970.

38. Ada Perry Scrapbook; Johnnie Lee Wills Scrapbook; Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook; Eldon Shamblin; Ruby Shamblin.

39. Tony Solow, in "They All Turned Out in Tulsa: Country Music Pays Memorable Tribute to Bob Wills," *Music City News,* 7, no. 8 (Feb., 1970), 23, gave an account of the problems stars had getting to Tulsa. Stonewall Jackson, he reported, "literally 'slid in' for the second performance." Hank Thompson, in his private plane, flew in through hazardous weather and landed on dangerous runways.

40. " 'Beat' by Snow, Western Show—Tulsa Pastors Admit They're Frosted," *Tulsa Daily World,* Jan. 25, 1970.

41. Ibid.

42. Ruby Shamblin.

43. Tom Wood, "Wills Benefit Attracts Thousands," *Tulsa Daily World,* Jan. 19, 1970.

44. "Pavilion Packed—Name of Bob Wills Is Magic Magnet," *Tulsa Tribune,* Jan. 19, 1970; "Crowds Force Second Show Sunday for Wills Benefit," *Tulsa Daily World,* Jan. 19, 1970; Solow, "They All Turned Out in Tulsa"; Eldon Shamblin; Ruby Shamblin. Listen also to Eldon Shamblin's comments in *A Tribute to Bob,* United Artists SP-105.

45. Wills Fund Hits Net of $24,400," *Tulsa Daily World,* Jan. 19, 1970; Solow, "They All Turned Out in Tulsa"; Ruby Shamblin; Eldon Shamblin; Betty Wills; Johnnie Lee Wills.

46. Wood, "Wills Benefit Attracts Thousands."

47. " 'Beat' by Snow, Western Show."

48. Ibid.

49. Solow, "They All Turned Out in Tulsa"; "Bob Wills Tributes to Be Held in Many Parts of Nation," *Western News,* 2, no. 11 (Feb., 1970), 1; "Bob Wills Tribute Show to Be Held at Oakland Auditorium," ibid., p. 12.

50. Enrolled House Resolution No. 1057, signed by Rex Privett, Speaker of the House of Representatives, State of Oklahoma, Jan. 14, 1970. See also Proclamation by Mayor J. M. Hewgley, Jr., of Tulsa, proclaiming the week of January 12 through 18, 1970, as Bob Wills Week. O. W. Mayo to Glenn P. White, Oct. 18, 1962; Betty Wills; Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook.

51. Betty Wills; Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook.

52. Bob Healy, Bob Pinson, Glenn P. White, "Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys: A Bio-Discography," *Record Research,* No. 79 (Oct., 1966), p. 4. At least three membership cards for the Bob Wills Night Club of the Air are extant. One is in the Glenn P. White Scrapbook, while two others are in the possession of O. W. Mayo and myself.

53. Wayne Mason, "Today They Play for Him," *Tulsa Sunday World,* Jan. 18, 1970. Eldon Shamblin; Smokey Dacus; Don Dennis; Winston Dennis; Al Stricklin. On Mar. 7, 1969, Glenn P. White and other Wills friends and fans organized the Bob Wills Round-Up Association. Their declared purpose was "to 'Round-up' all of Bob's music and build a lasting tribute to 'America's' Number One Western Swing Band."

54. Cf. Rupert Norvall Richardson, *Texas: The Lone Star State* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1943), p. 549.

55. *Ray Price Sings San Antonio Rose,* Columbia 1756 and LE 10021.

56. Leon McAuliffe. In its beat, swing, and spirit, McAuliffe's band was more like Wills's than was any other in the history of western swing. Listen to McAuliffe's *Swingin' Western Strings,* Cimarron CLP 2002, and especially *Everybody Dance, Everybody Swing,* Capitol T-2148. Good accounts of McAuliffe's career are "M'Auliffe's Band to Crystal City," *Tulsa Daily World,* May 25, 1947; Russell Gideon, "Records, Movies Beckon Tulsa's Leon and Band," ibid., Oct. 24, 1948; "Leon M'Auliffe to Be on KOTV," ibid., Nov. 27, 1949; Bob Claypool, "Stoneway Records Country Legend," *Houston Post,* Jan. 27, 1974. See also *"Take It Away": Leon McAuliffe and His Western Swing Band Souvenir Book* (Cimarron Ballroom, n.d.).

57. "Faded Love," MGM K 10786 (45 rpm). See also "Tompall and the Glaser Brothers," *Country Music Reporter,* 4, no. 1 (Jan., 1973), 6–8.

58. *The Bob Wills Story,* Starday SLP 469.

59. *A Tribute to the Best Damn Fiddle Player in the World (or, My Salute to Bob Wills),* Capitol ST 638.

60. Al Stricklin; Leon McAuliffe; Smokey Dacus; Johnny Gimble; Johnnie Lee Wills; Betty Wills; Bob Wills; Eldon Shamblin; Tiny Moore.

61. Corine Andrews; Joe Andrews; "Western Singer Dies," *Tulsa Tribune,* July 26, 1967; Phillip Banister Scrapbook.
62. Al Stricklin.
63. Johnnie Lee Wills; Alex Brashear; Joe Holley; Merle Haggard.
64. Smokey Dacus; Eldon Shamblin; Johnnie Lee Wills; Betty Wills.
65. Al Stricklin; Smokey Dacus.
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid.; Eldon Shamblin; Leon McAuliffe.
68. Leon McAuliffe; Al Stricklin.
69. Smokey Dacus; Al Stricklin; Eldon Shamblin.
70. Al Stricklin. Also Luke Wills; Eldon Shamblin; Leon McAuliffe; Alex Brashear; Joe Holley; Johnny Gimble; Betty Wills; Merle Haggard; Smokey Dacus; Johnnie Lee Wills.
71. Betty Wills; Al Stricklin. Haggard talked about his youth at length with Stricklin. He credited Wills not only with inspiring him musically, but also with inspiring him to make something of his life. For Wills's influence on Haggard and Haggard's admiration of Wills, see *Fact Sheet—Merle Haggard* and *Merle Haggard . . . Never Been Nobody's Idol,* pamphlets published by Merle Haggard, Inc., Bakersfield, Calif. See also *International Merle Haggard Fan Club,* Oct., 1969; "Patriotic, Working Man Songs by Haggard Make Hit with Nixon," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram,* Mar. 19, 1973; Malvina Stephenson, "Bartlett's Baskin 'Okie' Glow at Pat Nixon's Birthday Celebration," *Tulsa Daily World,* Mar. 21, 1973. See especially *Hag* (Bakersfield, Calif.: Blue Book Music, n.d.) and my interview with Haggard.

23

A Product of the Jazz Age

I as Governor of Texas do hereby designate Monday, March 6, 1972, as Country and Western Music Day in Texas in honor of Bob Wills.

Governor Preston Smith

In less than six months, Bob Wills and many of his Texas Playboys were back together again, this time for a public performance. The owner of the Blackstone Hotel in Fort Worth, whom Wills had befriended some twenty years earlier, wanted to have a mammoth show to celebrate Wills's sixty-seventh birthday, March 6, 1972.[1] Bob, his wife, and the children tried to discourage this, because they felt he had been honored far more than other musical pioneers.[2] When Bob was told that some former Texas Playboys whom he had not seen in years would be there, along with other old friends from California and Nashville, he gave his consent. He even agreed to appear, if his health permitted; it would be his first appearance since his stroke. On the day of the tribute, the area around the Blackstone Hotel in downtown Fort Worth looked like the Old West. The Odessa Chuckwagon Gang cooked barbecue beef right on the street and served it "with all the trimmings" at tables along the sidewalk.[3] A street adjacent to the hotel was blocked off for a street dance and party after the show. At least one hundred and fifty stars and musicians mingled in the Blackstone, creating, in effect, a musicians' convention. All day long Fort Worth–Dallas radio station WBAP referred to "Bob Wills Day" and even gave the time as "the Bob Wills time is now ———."

That night at the beautiful Tarrant County Convention Center, 6,400 people paid from five to fifteen dollars each to attend what was billed as "A Musical Tribute to the Immortal Bob Wills." Star after star and band after band appeared during the first part of the show. At the end of intermission, the houselights and spotlights were cut off, and while the house was dark Bob Wills was put on stage in his wheelchair, just at the right edge of stage one. Some of his original Texas Playboys, in fact some who had

played with Wills even before he organized the Playboys, were already set up beside him.[4]

With the lights out, and before the audience ever saw Wills, the master of ceremonies announced, "We want you to meet once again Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys."[5] The Playboys began playing "San Antonio Rose," and a spotlight was put on Bob in his wheelchair. As if every seat in the convention center had transmitted a simultaneous electric shock, the spectators jumped to their feet.[6] People of all ages left their seats and rushed to the bandstand to get a closer view of Wills and his group of pioneer musicians. They stayed as long as Wills and the band were there, just as they stood around the bandstand at Bob's dances. Nothing like this had occurred all night, though some of the most popular stars in show business had appeared. Leon McAuliffe, who had sung "San Antonio Rose," moved his steel guitar from the front of the stage just to the left and slightly behind Wills, not wanting to be in front of his old boss and yet close enough to talk to him and also speak for the band. Wills's speech was probably as good that night as it had been since his stroke.[7] The crowd obviously had not expected him to be able to speak, for when he cried "ah haa" during "San Antonio Rose," the audience broke into loud applause. Wills thanked them, and a silence fell, such that even a whisper could be heard. No one wanted to miss a word. Bob said, "They want us to play 'Steel Guitar Rag.' " Leon played his introductory chord on the steel guitar, then stopped as he always had, seemingly waiting for Wills to say something. As he had done hundreds of times before, Wills said, "Take it away, Leon." The crowd, still on its feet, went wild. Those few words—"Take it away, Leon"—got the biggest hand, by far, of anything that happened all evening.[8]

The governor of Texas, Preston Smith, had flown in from Austin to make a special award to Wills and to proclaim that day, Wills's birthday, "Country and Western Music Day in Texas in honor of Bob Wills." The city of San Antonio sent a representative to read a citation to Wills, as did the city of Fort Worth and the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers.[9]

Later, Leon McAuliffe introduced the Texas Playboys to the audience. Their names were a roll call of some of the most distinguished musicians in western music; their lives were among the most important pages of the history of western swing. Sleepy Johnson, who joined Wills at Crystal Springs in 1930 and became a Light Crust Doughboy the next year, was on guitar and violin. Johnnie Lee Wills, Bob's brother and one of the five original Playboys in Waco in 1933, was playing the instrument he played at that time, tenor banjo. Jesse Ashlock, one of the best jazz violinists in American music, whom Wills tutored at Crystal Springs in 1930 and who became a Texas Playboy in 1934, was on violin. Leon McAuliffe played the instrument he made famous, the steel guitar; he joined Wills in 1935. Al

Stricklin, one of the first to play a piano in a western band, became a Texas Playboy in 1935. Joe Ferguson, 1936, played bass and sang. Eldon Shamblin, 1937, was on guitar. Bob's brother Luke, bass and vocals, joined the Wills organization in 1939. Billy Jack Wills, Bob's youngest brother, played drums and sang; he started with the band in 1945. Johnny Gimble, violin and electric mandolin, became a Playboy in 1949. Keith Coleman, violin, became a Texas Playboy in 1949. Joe Andrews, vocals and bass, joined the band in 1951. Vocalist Romona Reed joined Wills in 1951. Jack Lloyd, one of the finest jazzmen Wills ever had, played clarinet and saxophone; he became a Playboy in 1960. Two former Playboys were at the tribute but did not perform: Ocie Stockard, tenor banjo, 1945; Leon Rausch, guitar and vocals, 1958.[10] Smokey Dacus, Wills's first drummer, could not be there, so Merle Haggard's drummer, Bill Madden, played the two-four beat. Of the former Texas Playboys there that night, seven had, at various times, led western swing bands of their own.

The audience insisted Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys play some of the songs they had made popular. Besides "San Antonio Rose," "Steel Guitar Rag," and others, there were two that are of particular interest in regard to Wills's place in the history of American music. One was "Faded Love." It was appropriate that night not only because it had been a hit, but also because it represented one of the dominant influences on Wills's life and music, frontier fiddling. It was presented in such a way as to trace the development of his musical career. Keith Coleman began it with a lonesome, bluesy fiddle, playing it as Bob himself had. Then Leon McAuliffe told how Wills began his career at ranch or country dances in West Texas with just a fiddle. Sleepy Johnson, the second professional guitarist Wills ever played with, joined in on guitar, and McAuliffe commented on that addition. Then he said, "But Bob didn't stop at this. He went on to organize the biggest and most famous western swing band of them all—Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys."[11] At once, the whole band—strings, horns, piano, drums—joined in the playing of "Faded Love." Tompall and the Glaser Brothers came to the platform, turned to Wills, rather than the audience, and sang it to him.

This performance was more than a beautiful tribute to a pioneer musician and composer. Historically, it depicted one of the two folk musics Wills began with in the early years of the twentieth century and on which he built his own genre. Art Satherley knew what he was about when he insisted Bob Wills do what he could do best, play fiddle music. Wills's role in making fiddle music both popular and respectable in American music has been significant. It is possible that the frontier fiddling he learned down between the rivers and the fiddle tunes he later composed and the style he made famous will live longer than all his other contributions to American music.

But why did Bob Wills's fiddle style have such vast appeal? Other violinists played some of the same selections he played, and many, Wills himself acknowledged, played them musically better.[12] The answer can be found in another selection Wills asked the Texas Playboys to play at the tribute in Fort Worth, Kokomo Arnold's "Milk Cow Blues"—not this particular piece, necessarily, but the blues idiom and jazz tradition it represented. He had first begun to learn and love the Negro blues when he was four or five years old, in the cotton fields and cotton camps of East and, later, West Texas. From his Negro friends he also learned rhythmic styles. When he began to play the fiddle, he incorporated enough of the blues idiom to create a style few other musicians ever had. Not even many Negro violinists had this sound in the period from 1915, when Wills played his first dance, to 1929, when he made his first recording.[13] The day of the tribute, Bob told me he "slurred it" to give his fiddling a blues sound.[14] Leon McAuliffe, who had a band of his own for nearly twenty years and employed fiddlers who were musically better trained than Wills, said of Wills's fiddle: "The only word that will fit it is *soul* or *feeling*. His fiddle had soul, it had feeling. It communicated with people. He played from . . . sincerity. It had a mournful soul, yet it was really smooth. They all tried to imitate it. But there never was another fiddler like him. They got close to him, because he left so much on record for them to hear." But, McAuliffe added, they never could really play like him "because they didn't have his soul."[15] Bob Wills was successful as a fiddler because he played *more* than the old-time music represented by "Faded Love"; he overlaid this with soul, with the blues.

Wills's career was long and successful in large part because of the way the confluence of folk musics he learned in his formative years affected the rest of his music. The influence of the Negro tradition, especially its jazz idioms, was as obvious and dominant that night in 1972 as in the records Wills made in the thirties, forties, fifties, and sixties. Basically, his music never changed. Whether it was the old-time fiddle tunes or the blues, or "San Antonio Rose," "Marie," "Sentimental Journey," "William Tell Overture," "Take Me Back to Tulsa," "Oh, Lady Be Good," "Back Home Again in Indiana," "Li'l Liza Jane," or "In the Mood," jazz was the one quality that permeated all his music.[16]

This influence was obvious in Wills's part of the Fort Worth tribute. As he sat there in his wheelchair, with all those Texas Playboy greats assembled once again, he must have thought of how many times he had wished for them after World War II scattered them to the winds. With very little rehearsal, they played together about as well as they had in the thirties and forties. Wills smiled approvingly all the time "his boys" played. He actually directed the band that night from his wheelchair.[17] After beginning a selection, all the musicians watched him instinctively, as they had learned

years earlier they had better do, to see to whom he would give the chorus. He did not point his fiddle bow at them as he used to; nor did he call their names. He smiled broadly and nodded at the one he wanted to take the chorus. First it was Al Stricklin, then Jesse Ashlock, then Eldon Shamblin, and then Jack Lloyd or some other Playboy. As they took their choruses they played jazz; they improvised; they wrote it as they went; they played blue notes; they syncopated; they swung it. These musicians demonstrated they were capable of the New Orleans jazz style Wills loved. Regardless of how many years one had listened to his music, it still sounded new, fresh, and exciting that night in 1972. Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys never improvised the same way twice, not even after thirty-seven years of playing some of the same songs.

Wills's career lasted nearly sixty years. He was still drawing good crowds in California and other places during his last tours, in the spring of 1969, fifty-four years after he played his first dance as a fiddler and fifty-six years since he first played for the public with his father.[18] How does a biographer explain the longevity of Bob Wills's appeal? Without taking anything from his ability as a fiddler, composer, or showman, the secret is this: Wills grew to maturity in the Jazz Age. Regardless of what one calls his music, jazz was its dominant aspect. The blues, improvisation, spontaneity, freedom, uninhibitedness, and soul of jazz were always basic. He tied his musical wagon to a form that appears to have universal and eternal appeal. William W. Austin, for example, professor of music at Cornell University and a student of both serious and popular music, summed up the attraction of jazz: "No other kind of music—no other kind of contemporary art whatever—had so many true and active friends as jazz."[19]

Bob Wills played a variety of jazz called western swing. It was a new American music. Like so many other pioneers, such as George Gershwin, Paul Whiteman, Fletcher Henderson, and Count Basie, his music and much of theirs was still jazz and greatly indebted to that musical form. Like these men, and Louis Armstrong, and his favorite, Bessie Smith, Wills was fortunate enough to have lived in the greatest and most creative period in American music. When all analysis of Wills and his music is over, the statement that will best describe him is this: Bob Wills was a product of the Jazz Age.

1. I was in Fort Worth for three days during this celebration and discussed Wills's life with many people who were attending or performing at the tribute. See Jack Gordon, "Bob Wills' Day Named by Mayor," *Fort Worth Press,* Mar. 1, 1972; Perry Stewart, "Bob Wills Tribute Set," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram,* Jan. 2, 1972; idem, "Bob Wills' Big Day," ibid., Mar. 6, 1972; idem, "He Topped the Stars," ibid., Mar. 7, 1972; Bill McAllister, "C-W Scene—Tribute Set for Fiddlin' King of Swing," ibid., Mar. 11, 1972; Jon McConal, "Wills Cheered by Thousands during Tribute," ibid., Mar. 7, 1972.

2. Betty Wills; Bob Wills; Diane Wills Arnold; Terry Arnold; James Robert Wills II; Cindy Wills James; Carolyn Wills Johnson; Bill Johnson; J. B. Walling. Also Governor Preston Smith to J. B. Walling, Feb. 29, 1972; Frank Boggs, "Fiddlin' Around Comes Easy for Wills," *Oklahoma's Orbit* (magazine supplement to *Sunday Oklahoman* [Oklahoma City]), Mar. 26, 1972; Jack Gordon, "Bob Wills to Be Honored at Astrodome," *Fort Worth Press*, June 20, 1973; idem, "Hold That Phone It's Bob Wills on the Line," ibid., Oct. 4, 1973; Bill Tharp, "Wills Fete Group to Meet Here," *Oklahoma Journal* (Oklahoma City), Jan. 12, 1972.

3. Wendell Gordon, field notes.

4. The program, "A Musical Tribute to the Immortal Bob Wills," includes a partial list of the stars who appeared. See McConal, "Wills Cheered by Thousands," and especially Stewart, "He Topped the Stars." See also Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook; Charles R. Townsend Scrapbook.

5. Listen to "A Musical Tribute to the Immortal Bob Wills."

6. See especially Stewart, "He Topped the Stars." See also "Tribute to Bob," *Country Music Reporter,* 3, no. 4 (Apr., 1972), 10; "Behind the Barn," ibid., 3, no. 6 (Sept., 1972), 7. "CMN Salute the Wills Family," *Country Music News,* 2, no. 7 (Aug., 1972), 1, 8–9, 11, 17; ibid., 2, no. 8 (Sept., 1972), 12, 17, 20; ibid., 2, no. 9 (Oct., 1972), 12, 17.

7. Betty Wills.

8. "A Musical Tribute to the Immortal Bob Wills"; McConal, "Wills Cheered by Thousands"; "Tribute to Bob."

9. Ibid.; Governor Preston Smith to J. B. Walling, Feb. 29, 1972; Schedule for Governor's Party, Mar. 6, 1972. See also Official Memorandum of Preston Smith, Governor of Texas, Mar. 6, 1973.

10. O. W. Mayo was also there, along with Darrell Jones, who played bass in the band in 1941–42 and appeared in the movie *Go West Young Lady.*

11. Listen to "A Musical Tribute to the Immortal Bob Wills." See also "Tompall and the Glaser Brothers," *Country Music Reporter,* 4, no. 1 (Jan., 1973), 6–8.

12. Bob Wills.

13. See the discussion of this point in chapter 3.

14. Bob Wills.

15. Leon McAuliffe.

16. Bob Wills.

17. Leon McAuliffe talked about this that night in Fort Worth; listen to "Musical Tribute to the Immortal Bob Wills."

18. "Bob Wills in Hall of Fame," *Western News,* 1, no. 8 (Nov., 1968), 1, 21; "Bob Wills," ibid., 1, no. 9 (Dec., 1968), 1; "Calif. Welcomes Bob Wills in March," ibid., 1, no. 12 (Mar., 1969), 1; "Bob Wills Performs to Packed House in San Antonio, Texas—The 'King' of Western Swing to Tour Calif. in Late March," ibid., p. 10; "Review: Bob Wills Tour in March—To Return in July," ibid., 2, no. 2 (May, 1969), 3, 19, 22.

19. William W. Austin, *Music in the 20th Century: From Debussy through Stravinsky* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966), p. 293.

24

Twilight Falls

Twilight falls; evening shadows find . . .
Bob Wills, "Maiden's Prayer"

Wills's Fort Worth appearance in March of 1972 was the first of several such appearances in that and the following year. He returned to his hometown of Turkey in West Texas in April, 1972, for the dedication of a historical marker erected near the farm between the rivers where western swing was born.[1] On his birthday, March 6, 1973, Wills was honored by thousands of fans and more than a hundred entertainers at Civic Auditorium in San Antonio.[2] The next month he returned to Turkey for the unveiling of an elaborate stele erected in his honor by the citizens of his hometown. The little town of fewer than six hundred people raised $15,000 to build the granite monument. It has eight panels, each with a picture of Wills and an inscription about a period in his life. The panels are eight feet high, and counting an aluminum tower above them, the monument measures thirty feet from base to top. Two large fiddles crown the monument and rotate slowly at the top of the tower, and Bob Wills's recordings are played continuously over giant speakers in the tower. Many of his former Texas Playboys and more than four thousand fans watched as Wills pulled the cord to unveil the stele. It was incredible that such an imposing monument should be erected to a man during his lifetime.[3]

After this celebration in the spring of 1973, Bob appeared to be stronger than he had been since his stroke four years earlier. He was determined to become active in his profession again. He told his wife there were three things he wanted to do that year: he wanted to play at a dance, to go to Nashville and receive an award ASCAP wished to give him, and to have another recording session with his Texas Playboys.

In late summer, Hoyle Nix invited Wills to Big Spring, Texas, to appear with him and his West Texas Cowboys at their regular Saturday night dance. Nix was one of Bob's greatest admirers and had a western swing band that had emulated the Wills style for nearly thirty years. Nix

intended that Bob just sit on the bandstand and watch the band after they honored him with a formal introduction. Determined to perform, Bob held the fiddle with his left hand and had Nix bow it. Not satisfied, Wills took the microphone with his good hand and sang part of an old Bessie Smith song, "Down Hearted Blues."[4]

In mid-October, Bob traveled to Nashville to receive a special citation from the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers "for his long, productive, and creative association with country music—and his unequaled leadership as a musician and man." It was the last thing on the agenda, and when the orchestra began playing "San Antonio Rose," Betty Wills brought Bob in in his wheelchair to a standing ovation. To the delight of those in attendance and the astonishment of his wife, he insisted on making an acceptance speech. He took the microphone, thanked those who had honored him, and spoke briefly to the dignitaries of the music world.[5]

While Wills was in Nashville, Tommy Allsup worked out the final details with him regarding a recording session for United Artists. They agreed to hold the session in Dallas on December 3 and 4. Bob and Betty returned home, and Bob began lining up former Texas Playboys for the session.[6]

The whole affair turned out to be a historic event in American music and a homecoming for Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys. On Sunday, the day before the session, each of the Playboys who was taking part went to Betty and Bob's home in Fort Worth. By mid-afternoon all the musicians had arrived and had their instruments set up in the living room. Betty rolled Bob in, and Bob smiled as his Texas Playboys, two daughters, their husbands, two granddaughters, and a few friends greeted him. One of the Playboys said, "Let's play 'San Antonio Rose' for him," and another asked, "How does it go?" Everyone laughed as they began playing the song that had made them and Bob Wills famous. They played other selections from their old repertory and rehearsed some of the new songs they were to record the next day. After about an hour, Betty served smoked turkey and ham. Everyone returned for another jam session, which lasted nearly an hour. Bob enjoyed it all. It was the kind of family atmosphere he and the band enjoyed when they were together in Tulsa for so many years. Bob had dreamed that somehow the Tulsa band would never break up and that even when they retired they could maintain the family ambience. World War II shattered Bob's dream and scattered his Texas Playboys. While that band never regrouped, United Artists brought some of them together again.[7]

The homecoming continued the next day at the recording session in Dallas. The Texas Playboys and a few special guests began arriving at the Sumet-Burnet Studio shortly before noon. The session was scheduled to

begin at noon, but Wills was delayed in Fort Worth. It came a downpour about the time Betty Wills, Al Stricklin, and I were ready to load Bob into his automobile for the trip to Dallas. About 1:00 P.M. Betty took her husband into the spacious studio. Some of the Playboys and members of the studio staff put Wills and his wheelchair in the center of the band, so that the Texas Playboys and their instruments formed a semicircle around their leader. Bob visited with "his boys" for a little while, smiling as if he wished to express how good it was to be recording with them again. It had been more than thirty-three years since he had been in a recording studio with Smokey Dacus; the last time was April 16, 1940, when they recorded "New San Antonio Rose." In addition to Dacus on drums, Keith Coleman played fiddle; Johnny Gimble, fiddle and electric mandolin; Eldon Shamblin, electric guitar; Leon McAuliffe, steel guitar and vocals; Al Stricklin, piano; Tommy Allsup, bass; Leon Rausch, bass and vocals. Hoyle Nix played the fiddle and sang on a few selections, and his son, Jody, was vocalist on three selections.[8]

Leon McAuliffe interrupted Wills's reunion with the Playboys. "Jim Rob, what do you want to record first?" Bob told them to play "Blue Bonnet Lane," a song the band introduced in a movie for Columbia Pictures in 1942. They discussed it briefly and made the recording. It had been nearly thirty years since most of them had played that selection together, and yet their first effort was good. Before the session ended the next night, they would record twenty-seven selections, twenty-four of which were released by United Artists in a two-record album entitled *For the Last Time.* In addition to all-time Wills favorites such as "San Antonio Rose," "Faded Love," "Milk Cow Blues," and "Twin Guitar Special,"[9] they introduced several new selections, including "What Makes Bob Holler," "Goin' Away Party," and "Baby, That Would Sure Go Good." The session also produced some frontier fiddle music: "Crippled Turkey," "Comin' Down from Denver," and "Silver Lake Blues."

Bob directed the band from his wheelchair, nodding to this Playboy and then another to take a jazz chorus. He watched every Playboy and smiled approvingly as they played, and each musician watched Bob constantly, as if playing especially for him. It had been a long time since anyone had seen Wills so thoroughly happy and contented.[10] When the music moved him, Bob gave out with his famous holler, and this pleased the Texas Playboys more than anything, because they knew he never hollered until they had the music "down in the groove."[11] As always, Wills had difficulty treating a sad song with any seriousness. When the band ended the plaintive "When You Leave Amarillo" and the vocalist sang the last line, Bob hollered, "Cut out the lights!" The laughter that followed those words nearly broke up the session.

After leading his Texas Playboys in six selections, Bob began to show

signs of tiring. No one sensed this, of course, except his wife of nearly thirty-two years. Since his stroke more than three and a half years earlier, Betty had been by his side constantly. Almost everyone in the studio knew Wills probably would not have been alive had it not been for her love and care. As the musicians and visitors crowded around his wheelchair, Bob told them good-bye and said he would see them at the session the next day. He was waving and smiling as Betty rolled him out of the studio.

Betty said Bob was feeling well as she drove him back to Fort Worth, but he was disappointed at not being able to speak and holler more distinctly while he was recording. After they got home, he played with his granddaughters while Betty prepared his dinner. After he ate, he listened to part of a tape of a dance he had played in Wichita in 1958, watched television a few minutes, and told his wife he wanted to rest. He kissed Betty good night and said, "Roll me down."[12]

These were his last words. When Betty got up in the night to roll him over, as she nearly always did, she thought he was resting comfortably. The next morning at breakfast he did not speak, just stared. Since he occasionally acted that way in the early morning, she thought little about it. However, after she fed him and tried to get him back on his hospital bed, he was limp and did not offer to help her at all. After she finally got him on the bed, she called their doctor. The doctor, fearing Wills had had another stroke, advised her to take him to the hospital if his condition did not improve during the day.

Betty called the recording studio to report that Bob could not be there for the final day of the session. The session got under way shortly after noon. Merle Haggard arrived shortly before noon and had a chance to visit with most of the musicians before the session resumed. He had appeared in Chicago the night before and made the drive to Dallas just to record with Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys. In mid-October, when Haggard learned about the session, he had gone to Wills's motel room in Nashville and asked if he could be included. Someone in the room joked, "Why, this is only union scale, Merle. You don't want in this." Haggard wanted in the session, and money had nothing to do with it. In fact, he was paid the same as every other musician there that day. For him, the day was the fulfillment of a boyhood dream.[13] He was vocalist on three selections and joined Coleman and Gimble on a few occasions, proudly playing one of Bob's old violins in the fiddle ensemble. As Haggard sang the "Texas Playboy Theme," which included the line "We're the Texas Playboys from the Lone Star State," it occurred to me, standing beside him, that Merle Haggard should in fact have been a Texas Playboy, because he had always been one at heart. Betty Wills summed it up best: "Merle wanted to be a Texas Playboy for a day."[14]

Various people called Betty during the day and then reported Bob's

condition to those in the studio. All the Playboys were saddened at the news. One of them remarked, and everyone agreed, "Bob was here yesterday by sheer determination—nothing else."[15] Al Stricklin and Leon McAuliffe played at various times that day with tear-filled eyes. And when the band recorded "San Antonio Rose" that night and Hoyle Nix took Wills's part and hollered, there were few dry eyes in the entire studio, because Hoyle sounded so much like Bob.[16] The session ended late Tuesday night with the pop song "That's What I Like 'bout the South."

On Wednesday, Betty took Bob to the hospital. He had another severe stroke that day, and the doctors gave her no hope that he would live more than a few hours. Betty's doctor, in fact, told her Bob could not possibly regain consciousness. She called the children who lived out of town, and they were soon there.[17]

When those who had helped with the Dallas session learned of Wills's condition, they realized that session was a landmark in the history of American music. It had brought together, for the last time,[18] Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys, the man and the band who created western swing and, for more than forty years, influenced popular American music in general and country-and-western in particular. They ended their recording career in 1973 where they began it in 1935, in Dallas. Four of them had taken part in both sessions.[19] For Bob Wills himself, who first recorded with Herman Arnspiger in Dallas in 1929, this ended a distinguished and even longer recording career. During more than forty-four years he had recorded some 550 sides.

This final session was more than just another session; it was part of the human story of a bandleader and his musicians who pioneered a new music. To the end of his career, Bob Wills refused to compromise his music with any other, regardless of how commercially attractive it might have been. He loved music more than money and wanted to play the style that best expressed his feeling and soul. Music was not a means to an end; music was an end in itself. Music was not a way of life to him; music *was* life. It was while he was playing that he was confident and secure, that he enjoyed some of his happiest moments. To the end, the frontier fiddling, the blues, the New Orleans jazz were all blended into a music that was called western swing, but was really Bob Wills.

Though he had many disappointments and cruel blows, both personal and professional, in his fifty-eight years in show business, his musical career ended on a happy note, almost like a fairy tale. Despite his partial paralysis, he had done everything he wanted to do in the last year of his career; above all, he wanted to perform in another recording session and be with his Texas Playboys again. They had a homecoming one day and a recording session the next, and he loved every bit of it. He went home, played with his granddaughters, listened to his music, kissed Betty good

night, and peacefully, perhaps serenely, slipped into unconsciousness. One would hope that in those last moments of consciousness he was thinking of the ranch dances in West Texas, of his Texas Playboys and the Tulsa years, of "San Antonio Rose" or "Faded Love," or of the recording session that day at homecoming in 1973.

Bob Wills could no longer stay the hand of failing health and what in his condition was old age. The twilight was gone; the evening shadows were falling longer and longer. After remaining in a coma for nearly eighteen months, he died of pneumonia on May 13, 1975. Bob had requested that his body be taken back to Tulsa for burial. Two days after his death, he was entombed in Memorial Park in Tulsa, the city where he had spent the greatest years of his career.

Tributes, eulogies, television and radio shows, and special memorials were presented in every section of the nation.[20] One especially perceptive editorial read: "Wills died the other day at 70 after years of retirement from the business at which he succeeded so admirably—the business of making Americans happy." The same writer referred to his style as "a musical genre that is of the people, by the people, for the people: The people Bob Wills moved so regularly, so joyously. And who will surely miss him."[21] Charles Osgood's excellent tribute on the CBS Radio Network's "News Break" the day after Bob's death focused on his role in the development of popular music in America. As an old Wills recording of "San Antonio Rose" played in the background, Osgood observed, "Bob Wills was cutting new ground." His final reflection concerned Bob's impact on American music: "Maybe Bob Wills was not Bach or Mozart or Tchaikovsky, but in American music, he was something special."[22]

Of the many tributes to Bob which I have seen, read, and heard, especially after his death, the one that most impressed me was not intended to be a tribute at all. I refer to the love of his wife and children. This I observed during my interviews with Bob for this book. As I went into his home time after time, month after month, and saw the love Betty Wills manifested in the unselfish and devoted care she gave him, I learned more about the man than words could ever express. The love of their children, James Robert II, Carolyn, Diane, and Cindy, also spoke a thousand words. The warmth and depth of affection that abounded in their home I have seen very few times. Even the little granddaughters would come into Bob's room during our interviews—quite unannounced—and love and play with "Pap Paw."

Despite the stroke that left him paralyzed in his last years, Bob enjoyed life. For the first time since he left West Texas in the late twenties, he could stay at home and enjoy his family. He also had the leisure to listen to the various forms of popular American music which had always brought him such great pleasure.[23] More important to him, Bob saw his own music

increasingly accepted and praised. Friends, fans, and performers around the world sent him records and tapes of tributes to him as an artist and composer.[24] He listened as the world played his music: symphony orchestras, rock groups, college combos, country groups, popular orchestras, jazz bands, pianists, and, of course, western swing bands. One of the most pleasing to Bob was a symphonic arrangement of his "Maiden's Prayer" and "Faded Love" by Felix Slatkin, director of the Twentieth-Century Fox Symphony Orchestra. As he listened to those two recordings, Bob Wills realized, perhaps for the first time, that he may have written music for the ages.

Somehow, though, regardless of how well other artists perform his music, none catch its spirit quite as ten-year-old Jim Rob did when he played his first ranch dance in West Texas in 1915. And better than all the words spoken and written about Bob Wills, his own, from "San Antonio Rose," best summarize his life and career. Betty Wills appropriately had them engraved on the plaque that marks his grave:

Deep within my heart lies a melody

1. Lawton Williams, "Home near Turkey, Tex.—Marker Will Honor Bob Wills," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram,* Apr. 15, 1972. See also "Bob Wills Inventor of Western Swing," *Billboard,* Feb. 26, 1972; Tanner Lane, "Bob Wills—Ex-Barber's Fame Sure to Persist," *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal,* Apr. 10, 1972; Karen Wright, "At Southwest Collection: 'Festus,' Prof Discuss Old Friend Bob Wills," ibid., Apr. 23, 1972; idem, "Inspiration from Hometown Boy—Turkey on the Comeback Trail," ibid., Apr. 30, 1972; "Bob Wills Honored—Turkey Eyes toward Comeback," ibid.; " 'Bob Wills Day' Is Slated at Turkey," *Matador* (Tex.) *Tribune,* Apr. 20, 1972; "Turkey to Erect Historical Marker," *Amarillo Sunday News-Globe,* Apr. 23, 1972; Luron Brown, "Thousands Join Turkey Folks for Bob Wills Homecoming," ibid., Apr. 30, 1972.

2. Sharon Watkins, "Around the Plaza," *San Antonio Light,* Jan. 25, 1973; Townsend Miller, "Country Music: Second Annual Nashville Fan Fair Set," *Austin American-Statesman,* Mar. 10, 1973; "Wills Gets Big Birthday Check," *San Antonio Express,* Mar. 14, 1973; "San Antonio KBUC to Honor Bob Wills," *K-BUC Kicker,* 5, no. 2 (Feb.–Mar., 1973), 1; "Bob Wills Benefit Raises $12,150," ibid., 5, no. 3 (Mar.–Apr., 1973), 1, 7, 8, 14, 17. Listen also to "Bob Wills Tribute," San Antonio, Tex., Mar. 6, 1973.

3. "Turkey Establishes Memorial to Wills," *Amarillo Daily News,* Apr. 30, 1973. Listen also to "Bob Wills Day," Turkey, Tex., Apr. 28, 1973.

4. Bob Wills; Betty Wills; Hoyle Nix; Jody Nix; Hoyle Nix, on *A Tribute to Bob,* United Artists SP-105. See also Floyce Korsak, "Bob Wills: The Strains of His 'San Antonio Rose' Are Loosed into Whatever Infinity," *Dallas Times-Herald,* July 23, 1973.

5. Red O'Donnell, "Foster, Rice Get Awards," *Nashville Banner,* Oct. 18, 1973; Jerry Bailey, " 'Bad Guys' Still Top Shooters at ASCAP Fete," *Tennessean* (Nashville), Oct. 18, 1973; "ASCAP Announces Country Winners at Nashville Awards Banquet," *ASCAP Today,* 6, no. 2 (Jan., 1974), 22; "Wills Makes Appearance," *Billboard,* Oct. 27, 1973, p. 37; "Wills Honored at ASCAP Banquet," *Cash Box,* Nov. 3, 1973, p. 41; "ASCAP Honors Wills," *Record World,* Oct. 27, 1973, p. 55; Bill Hance, "Western Swing Music Comes Back Strong," *Nashville Banner,* Nov. 10, 1973. See also "ASCAP to Fete Former Tulsa Songwriter: Bandleader Bob Wills to Be Guest at Nashville Dinner," *Tulsa Daily World,* Oct. 11, 1973; Betty Wills; Bob Wills; Al Stricklin; Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook.

6. Tommy Allsup; Bob Wills; Betty Wills; Al Stricklin. For a more detailed account of this session, see my booklet, "Homecoming: Reflections on Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys, 1915–1973," accompanying the album *For the Last Time,* United Artists UA-LA216-J2.

7. I was a guest in the Wills home for this homecoming and taped the entire affair. See also Jon McConal, "What Makes Bob Holler? Deep Within His Heart. . . . ," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram,* Dec. 6, 1973; Daniel Henninger, "Records in Review—The Rock Pile: The Playboys' Last Roundup," *National Observer,* July 6 1974; Wesley Pruden, Jr., "Where Red-Neck Is Beautiful: It's the Home of an Old Marriage—Country and Rock," ibid., Aug. 31, 1974, p. 6; "Recordings," *Playboy,* 21, no. 9 (Sept., 1974), 36–37; "Bob Wills' Album Placed in Library of Congress," *Amarillo Sunday News-Globe,* July 28, 1974; Bob Claypool, "Country—'Last Time' Magnificent Tribute to Wills," *Houston Post,* May 30, 1974; Joe Davenport, "Records—A Glance Back with Bob Wills' Playboys," *San Antonio Express-News,* June 9, 1974; "LP's—For the Last Time—Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys," *Cash Box,* June 1, 1974, p. 33; "Country," *Billboard,* June 1, 1974, p. 48; "Billboard FM Action Picks," *Billboard,* June 15, 1974, p. 35; "Billboard Hot Country LPs, *Billboard,* Aug. 3, 1974, p. 38; "The Country Album Chart," *Record World,* July 27, 1974, p. 51; "Library of Congress Cites Bob Wills," ibid.; "Country Record by Bob Wills in Library," *Dallas Morning News,* July 20, 1974; Bill Williams and Bob Kirsch, "Gilley, Rodriguez Spread Fame of Texas' Country Music Heritage," *Billboard,* Sept. 7, 1974, pp. T-8, T-16; Jim Miller, "He Put Western into C&W," *Rolling Stone,* No. 188 (June 5, 1975), p. 53.

8. Listen to *For the Last Time* and *A Tribute to Bob.*

9. Erroneously listed as "Twin Guitar Boogie" in *For the Last Time.*

10. Betty Wills.

11. Smokey Dacus; Leon McAuliffe; Al Stricklin; Eldon Shamblin; Keith Coleman; Johnny Gimble.

12. Betty Wills.

13. Merle Haggard, field notes at the session.

14. Betty Wills.

15. Leon McAuliffe. Also Leon Rausch; Johnny Gimble; Al Stricklin; Eldon Shamblin; Keith Coleman; Tommy Allsup; Smokey Dacus; Merle Haggard; Don Dennis.

16. Leon Rausch; Don Dennis; Leon McAuliffe; Tommy Allsup; Johnny Gimble; Eldon Shamblin; Hoyle Nix.

17. Betty Wills.

18. It was after Wills's final stroke that United Artists decided to entitle the album *For the Last Time* rather than *Homecoming.* See also Betty Coleman, "Bob's Holler Echoes in Tribute by W T Prof," *Amarillo Daily News,* Dec. 19, 1974; Mike Greenstein, "Music—Bob Wills: Father of Western Swing," *Syracuse* (N.Y.) *New Times,* Dec. 15, 1974.

19. Bob Wills; Smokey Dacus; Leon McAuliffe; Al Stricklin.

20. "Bob Wills Dies; Country Singer: Originated Western Swing and Led Texas Playboys," *New York Times,* May 14, 1975; "Notables," *National Observer,* May 24, 1975, p. 2; "Milestones," *Time,* May 26, 1975, p. 66; "Transition," *Newsweek,* May 26, 1975, p. 53; "Colorful Bandleader Bob Wills, 70, Dies," *Houston Chronicle,* May 14, 1975; " 'Last Trail' Ends for Western Band Leader Bob Wills," *Tulsa Tribune,* May 14, 1975; "King of Western Swing, Wills, Dies," *Tulsa Daily World,* May 14, 1975; Betty Coleman, " 'King of Western Swing,' Bob Wills, Dies at 70," *Amarillo Daily News,* May 14, 1975; "Wills—Country Great," *Saturday Enquirer and Ledger* (Columbus, Ga.), May 17, 1975; Chet Flippo, "Obituary—Bob Wills Dead at 70," *Rolling Stone,* No. 189 (June 19, 1975), p. 15; Jess Ritter, "Bob Wills—Stay a Little Longer," *Kansas City Star,* June 1, 1975. In the "The Bob Wills Memorial Issue" of *Buddy,* 11, no. 12 (July, 1975), see Michael Pellecchia, "Asleep at the Wheel: Keeping the Memory of Bob Wills Alive" (pp. 12, 24, 25); Pete Oppel, "Bob Wills Is Still the King" (pp. 15–17); Michael Pellecchia, "Open Letter to Carolyn Wills" (p. 18). See also "Services Held for 'Father of Western Swing,' " *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), May 16, 1975; "Closing Chord," *International Musician,* 73, no. 12 (June, 1975), 14; "Bob Wills, 1906 [*sic*]—1975,"

Billboard, May 24, 1975, p. 23; *Picking Up the Tempo,* No. 10 (Aug., 1974), the "Bob Wills Edition"; Charles R. Townsend, "A Personal Memoir: Bob Wills," *Country Music,* 3, no. 12 (Sept., 1975), 42–43, 68; idem, "Bob Wills," in *Stars of Country Music: Uncle Dave Macon to Johnny Rodriguez,* ed. Bill C. Malone and Judith McCulloh (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), pp. 157–178; "Bob Wills Eulogized," *News* (Mexico City), May 15, 1975.

21. "Bob Wills," *Dallas Morning News,* May 16, 1975.

22. Charles Osgood, "News Break," CBS Radio Network, May 14, 1975.

23. Sean Toolan, "Whole World Fell in Love with Bob Wills' 'New San Antonio Rose'—Bedridden King of Western Songs Finds Comfort in His Loving Wife, Friends, Music," *National Tattler,* Dec. 23, 1973, p. 23.

24. Bob Wills; Betty Wills; field notes made at the Wills home in Fort Worth.

Bob Wills at home in Fort Worth, 1972. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

At the Musical Tribute to the Immortal Bob Wills, Fort Worth, March 6, 1972. *Left to right:* Governor Preston Smith, Bob Wills, unidentified officer. *(Courtesy Governor Preston Smith)*

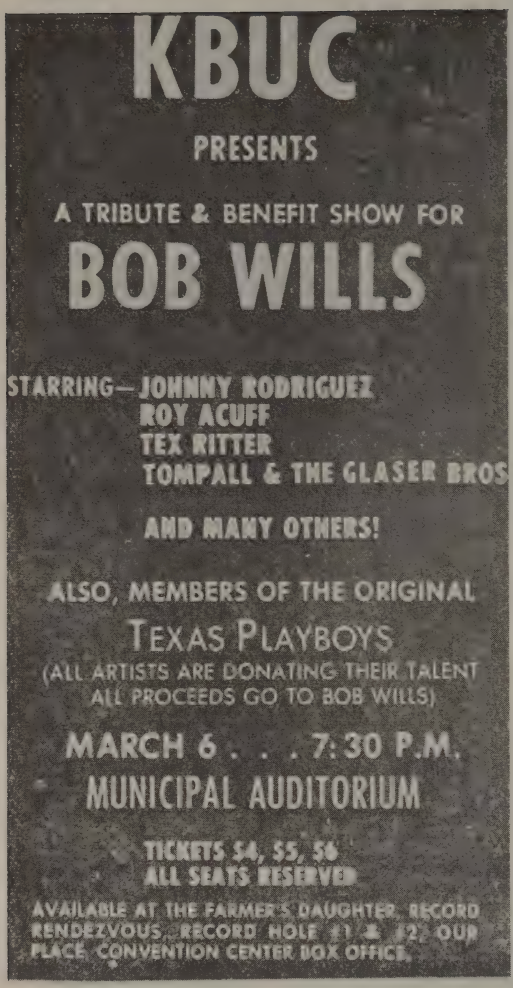
At Bob Wills Days, Turkey, Texas, April, 1972. *Left to right:* Johnnie Lee Wills, Sleepy Johnson, Bob Wills, unidentified man, Jesse Ashlock. *(Photo by William D. Townsend)*

At the Tribute and Benefit Show for Bob Wills, San Antonio, March 6, 1973. *Left to right:* unidentified official of KBUC, Bob Wills, Leon McAuliffe. *(Courtesy KBUC radio, San Antonio)*

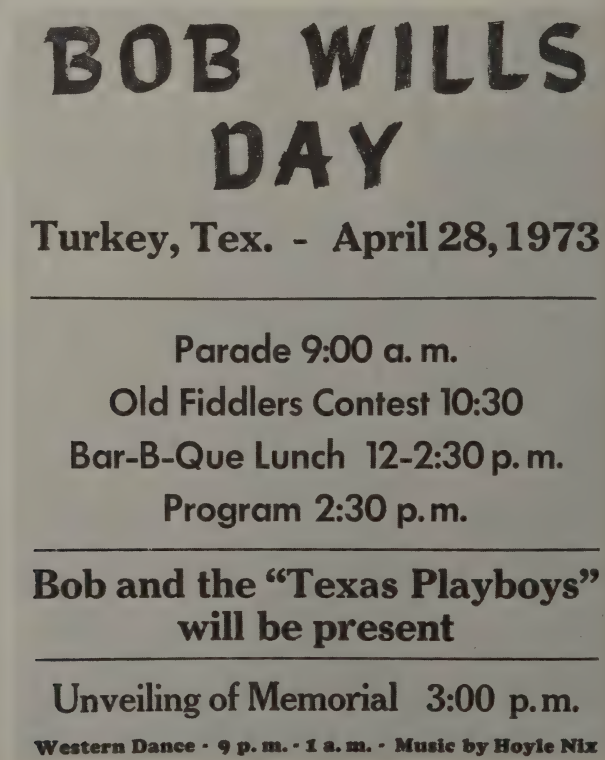
Backstage at the tribute to Bob Wills, San Antonio, March 6, 1973. *Left to right:* Johnny Rodriguez, Bob Wills. *(Courtesy KBUC radio, San Antonio)*

At the tribute for Wills, San Antonio, March 6, 1973. *Seated, left to right:* Laura Lee (Owens) McBride, Bob Wills, Joe Andrews, Jesse Ashlock; *standing:* Al Stricklin, Glenn Rhees, Sleepy Johnson, Joe Ferguson, Smokey Dacus, Leon McAuliffe, Andy Jackson (KBUC), Leon Rausch, Keith Coleman, Johnnie Lee Wills. *(Courtesy KBUC radio, San Antonio)*

At the Tribute and Benefit Show for Bob Wills in San Antonio, March 6, 1973. *Seated, left to right:* unidentified KBUC official, Bob Wills, Andy Jackson (KBUC); *standing:* Sleepy Johnson, unidentified KBUC official, Jesse Ashlock, Johnnie Lee Wills. *(Courtesy KBUC radio, San Antonio)*



Poster for the Bob Wills tribute in San Antonio, March 6, 1973. *(Courtesy Johnnie Lee Wills)*


BOB WILLS
DAY
Turkey, Tex. - April 28, 1973
Parade 9:00 a. m.
Old Fiddlers Contest 10:30
Bar-B-Que Lunch 12-2:30 p. m.
Program 2:30 p. m.
Bob and the "Texas Playboys"
will be present
Unveiling of Memorial 3:00 p. m.
Western Dance - 9 p. m. - 1 a. m. - Music by Hoyle Nix

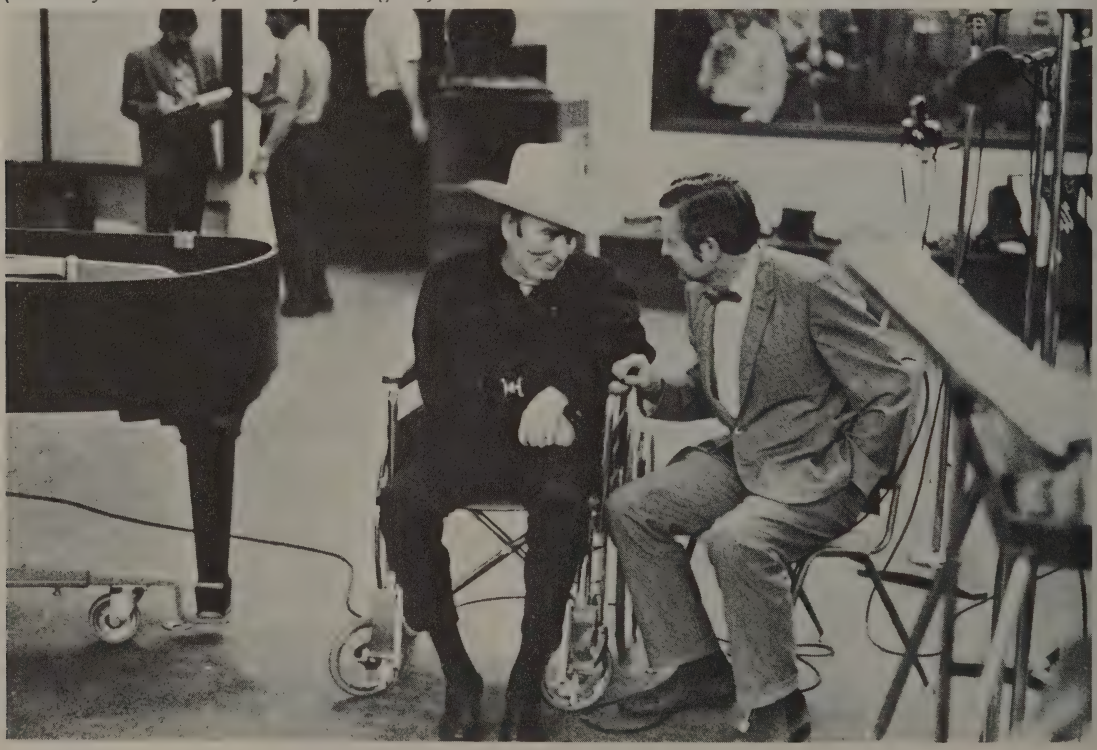
Poster advertising Bob Wills Day. *(Courtesy Charles Townsend, Jr.)*

Presentation of a special citation from the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers in Nashville, October 17, 1973. *Left to right:* Betty Wills, Bob Wills, Ed Shea (ASCAP southern region director). *(Courtesy Bob Schanz Studio)*

At the ASCAP awards in Nashville, 1973. *Left to right:* Tex Ritter, Bob Wills, Joe Bob Barnhill. *(Courtesy Bob and Betty Wills)*

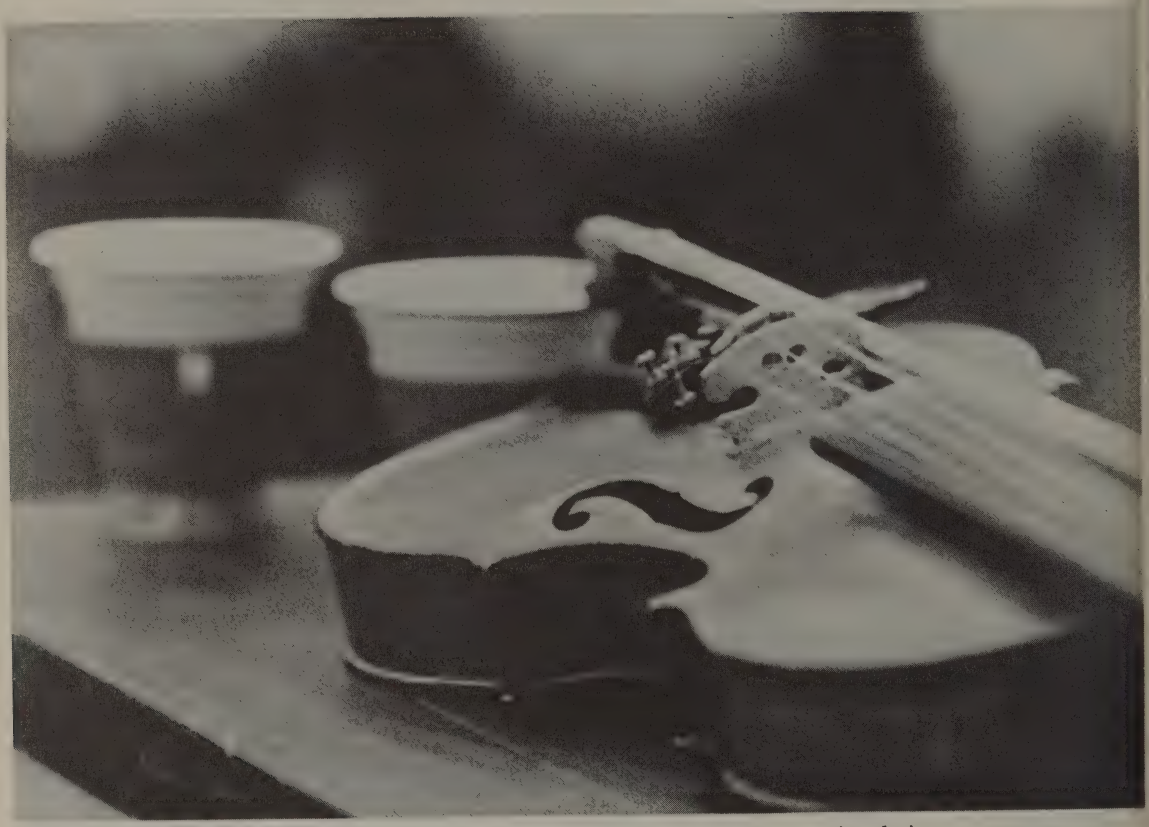
At the recording session for United Artists, Dallas, December 3, 1973. *Left to right:* Jody Nix, Bob Wills, Betty Wills. *(Photo by Bill Ward, KLAC, Los Angeles)*

Bob Wills and Charles R. Townsend at the United Artists recording session in Dallas, December 3, 1973. *(Photo by Bill Ward, KLAC, Los Angeles)*



Bob Wills at his final recording session, December 3, 1973. *(Courtesy Bill Ward, KLAC, and United Artists, Hollywood)*

Performers at Bob Wills's last recording session, Dallas, December 4, 1973. *Left to right:* Merle Haggard, Leon McAuliffe, Charles R. Townsend (partially hidden). *(Photo by Bill Ward, KLAC, Los Angeles)*



Bob Wills's fiddle, Dallas, December 3, 1973. *(Photo by Bill Ward, KLAC, Los Angeles)*

Essay on Sources

In the notes I have acknowledged the more important sources consulted in my research. Here I wish to indicate to future scholars the principal areas where information on Bob Wills and his music may be found.

ORAL HISTORY

As I noted in the Preface, the principal sources for this study were the interviews I had with Bob Wills, his family, his musicians and others with whom he worked, his friends, and his fans. Other researchers made a limited number of interviews with Wills, his family, and his musicians. I have had access to most of these and am grateful to those who made them available. Unless noted otherwise, I conducted all the interviews listed in this section. The symbol (T) indicates that the interview was taped and that the tape is in my possession. The remaining interviews are represented by field notes, correspondence, or other materials in my files.

Teddy Adams. Tulsa, Okla., May 15, 1975.
Danny Alguire. Interview with Ken Griffis, Studio City, Calif., Dec. 15, 1970, on deposit at the John Edwards Memorial Foundation, University of California at Los Angeles (T).
Richard B. Allen. New Orleans, La., Jan. 2–3, 1973; Canyon, Tex., Dec. 21–24, 1973.
Tommy Allsup. Fort Worth, Tex., Dec. 2, 1973 (T); Dallas, Tex., Dec. 3–4, 1973; Nashville, Tenn., Dec. 5, 1974.
Corine Andrews. Mesquite, Tex., Mar. 29, 1972 (T).
Joe Andrews. Mesquite, Tex., Mar. 29, 1972 (T); Mar. 6, 1973 (T).
Phillip Arnett. Sunnyvale, Calif., Dec. 25–26, 1974 (T).
Rosetta Wills Arnett. Sunnyvale, Calif., Dec. 27, 1973; Dec. 5, 1974; Dec. 25–26, 1974 (T).
Diane Wills Arnold. Fort Worth, Tex., Dec. 30, 1971 (T); Dec. 2, 1973; Nov. 29, 1974.
Herman Arnspiger. Tulsa Okla., Mar. 19, 1971 (T).
Jesse Ashlock. Fort Worth, Tex., Mar. 6, 1972 (T); San Antonio, Tex., Mar. 6, 1973 (T).
_____. Interview with Ken Griffis, North Hollywood, Calif., June 20, 1971, on deposit at the John Edwards Memorial Foundation, UCLA (T).
Gene Autry. Oklahoma City, Okla., May 3, 1975 (T).
Blanche Baker. Wichita Falls, Tex., July 1, 1968 (T).
Johnnie Baker. Memphis, Tex., Apr. 5, 1975 (T).
Maggie Wills Baker. Memphis, Tex., Apr. 5, 1975 (T).
George Balay. Tulsa, Okla., Mar. 27, 1972 (T).
Bobby Barker. San Antonio, Tex., Mar. 6, 1973.
Gene Barnard. Fresno, Calif., Dec. 23, 1974.
Laverne Simmons Barnhill. Turkey, Tex., June 5, 1969 (T).

Johnny Bond. North Hollywood, Calif., Dec. 22, 1974.
Bonnie Bourne. New York, N.Y., Feb. 27, 1975.
James B. Bowman. Canyon, Tex., Oct. 1, 1974; Dallas, Tex., Nov. 7, 1974.
Alex Brashear. Fresno, Calif., Dec. 23, 1974 (T).
Buster Brown. Amarillo, Tex., Sept. 15–16, 1972.
Durwood Brown. Fort Worth, Tex., Dec. 31, 1971 (T).
Mary Helen Brown. Amarillo, Tex., Sept. 15–16, 1972 (T); Fort Worth, Tex., Jan. 15, 1975; June 8, 1975 (T).
Joe Burton. Tulsa, Okla., May 15, 1975; Las Vegas, Nev., May 19, 1975.
Lorene Wills Burton. Oklahoma City, Okla., Oct. 9, 1971 (T).
Robbie Jo Wills Calhoun. Dallas, Tex., Dec. 1, 1973 (T).
Jo Canaster. Benkelman, Nebr., Aug. 8–9, 1971, on deposit in the Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University (T).
Ron Canaster. Benkelman, Nebr., Aug. 8–9, 1971, on deposit in the Southwest Collection, TTU (T).
Ken Carey. Turkey, Tex., June 4, 1969 (T).
Mary Lou Cloud. Tulsa, Okla., Dec. 27, 1973 (T).
Keith Coleman. Fort Worth, Tex., Mar. 6, 1972 (T).
Fred Collins. Memphis, Tex., Apr. 5, 1975 (T).
Mrs. C. J. Condrap. Turkey, Tex., Apr. 29, 1973.
Gene Crownover. Tulsa, Okla., May 15, 1975; Oct. 10, 1975 (T).
Ken Curtis. Lovington, N. Mex., Aug. 22–23, 1969; Lubbock, Tex., Apr. 22, 1972, on deposit in the Southwest Collection, TTU (T).
Ruby Cushenberry. Turkey, Tex., Apr. 29, 1973.
William Eschol "Smokey" Dacus. Rogers, Ark., Dec. 22, 1971 (T).
R. K. Deckard. Amarillo, Tex., Feb. 8, 1972.
Ray DeGeer. Tulsa, Okla., Dec. 29, 1971 (T).
Harold Dejan. Canyon, Tex., Sept. 14, 1972 (T).
Don Dennis. San Antonio, Tex., Mar. 6, 1973; Grady, Okla., Mar. 8, 1973; Dallas, Tex., Dec. 3–4, 1973.
Winston Dennis. Fort Worth, Tex., Mar. 6, 1972.
Casey Dickens. Tulsa, Okla., May 15, 1975.
Vera Dial Dickey. Memphis, Tex., Apr. 5, 1974.
W. P. Doherty. Hedley, Tex., Oct. 20, 1974.
Ruth Downing. Tulsa, Okla., Dec. 28, 1973 (T).
Neil Duer. Fort Worth, Tex., Apr. 21, 1973.
Glynn Duncan. Interview with Ken Griffis, Norco, Calif., Oct. 30, 1970, on deposit at the John Edwards Memorial Foundation, UCLA (T).
Tommy Duncan. Nocona, Tex., June 15, 1948; Ardmore, Okla., June 28, 1948.
_____ and Bob Wills. Interview with T. Texas Tiny, Los Angeles, Calif., 1960 (T).
Echohawk. Turkey, Tex., Feb. 19, 1972.
Bryant Eddleman. Turkey, Tex., Apr. 29, 1973.
Mrs. Bryant Eddleman. Turkey, Tex., Apr. 29, 1973.
Willie Favors. Memphis, Tex., Apr. 5, 1975 (T).
Harry Fenstemaker. Dallas, Tex., Dec. 3–4, 1973; Dec. 6, 1973 (T).
Joe Ferguson. Fort Worth, Tex., Dec. 5, 1971 (T).
Estell Foster. Memphis, Tex., Apr. 5, 1975.
Gertrude Wills Fowler. Memphis, Tex., Apr. 5, 1975 (T).
Vernon Fowler. Memphis, Tex., Apr. 5, 1975 (T).
Joe Franz. Canyon, Tex., Sept. 30, 1972; Austin, Tex., Mar. 19, 1974.
Porky Freeman. North Hollywood, Calif., Dec. 22, 1974.
John Luther Garner. Interview with Jackie Martin, Clarendon, Tex., Feb. 8, 1975, original in my possession (T).
Sam Gibbs. Wichita Falls, Tex., Nov. 25, 1972 (T).
Dan Gibson. Turkey, Tex., June 3, 1969 (T).

Johnny Gimble. Fort Worth, Tex., Mar. 6, 1972 (T); Dec. 2, 1973 (T); Dallas, Tex., Dec. 3–4, 1973.
Henry "Booker T." Glass. Canyon, Tex., Sept. 14, 1972 (T).
Vernon Goodall. Waco, Tex., Apr. 19, 1973.
Wendell Gordon. Fort Worth, Tex., Mar. 6, 1972.
Mrs. Benny Green. Waco, Tex., June 17, 1974.
Ken Griffis. Los Angeles, Calif., Oct. 26, 1972; Sept. 8, 1973; Cherry Hill, N.J., Sept. 23, 1974; North Hollywood, Calif., Dec. 22–23, 28, 1974.
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Mrs. Wayne Hackerson. Turkey, Tex., Apr. 29, 1973.
Merle Haggard. Dallas, Tex., Dec. 4, 1973.
———. Interview with Bill Ward, KLAC, Hollywood, Calif., 1970, on deposit at the John Edwards Memorial Foundation, UCLA (T).
Mrs. F. O. Ham. Turkey, Tex., June 4, 1969 (T).
Harold Ham. Turkey, Tex., June 4, 1969 (T); Feb. 19, 1972.
Stuart Hamblin. North Hollywood, Calif., Dec. 22, 1974.
Gene Hames. Amarillo, Tex., Sept. 15–16, 1972.
Billy Jo Hancock. Nocona, Tex., June 6, 1969, on deposit in the Southwest Collection, TTU (T).
Cora Hancock. Nocona, Tex., June 6, 1969, on deposit in the Southwest Collection, TTU (T).
Tommy Louis Hancock. Nocona, Tex., June 6, 1969, on deposit in the Southwest Collection, TTU (T).
Jeff Hanna. Canyon, Tex., Mar. 14, 1972 (T).
Jewel Hardaway. Turkey, Tex., June 4, 1969 (T).
W. E. Haynes. Washburn, Tex., Sept. 24, 1972 (T).
Lawrence Hedrick. Turkey, Tex., June 4, 1969 (T).
Harold Hensley. North Hollywood, Calif., Dec. 22, 1974.
Joe Holley. Fresno, Calif., Dec. 23, 1974 (T).
Ed House. Turkey, Tex., June 4, 1969 (T).
Eloise Wills House. Tulsa, Okla., Dec. 28, 1972 (T).
Ruth House. Turkey, Tex., June 4, 1969 (T).
Dewitt Huffines. Turkey, Tex., June 4, 1969 (T).
Harley Huggins. Fresno, Calif., Dec. 23, 1974.
George Humphrey. 6666 Ranch near Guthrie, Tex., July 9, 1969, on deposit in the Southwest Collection, TTU (T).
Jim Ibbotson. Canyon, Tex., Mar. 14, 1972 (T).
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Carolyn Wills Johnson. Fort Worth, Tex., Dec. 30, 1971 (T); Nov. 29, 1974.
Clifton "Sleepy" Johnson. Fort Worth, Tex., Nov. 26, 1971 (T).
Rome Johnson. North Hollywood, Calif., Dec. 22, 1974.
Sally Johnson. Fort Worth, Tex., Nov. 26, 1971 (T).
Wayne Johnson. Tulsa, Okla., Mar. 26, 1972 (T).
Darrell Jones. Fort Worth, Tex., Mar. 6, 1972 (T).
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Enid Justin. Nocona, Tex., June 24, 1969, on deposit in the Southwest Collection, TTU (T).
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Annie Keck. Nocona, Tex., Dec. 25, 1949; Levelland, Tex., May 25, 1950.
Jim L. Keck. Nocona, Tex., Jan. 1, 1973.
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Jack Lloyd. Fort Worth, Tex., Mar. 6, 1972 (T).
Guy Logsdon. Tulsa, Okla., Dec. 22, 1971.
Dorothy Long. Houston, Tex., Nov. 5, 1974 (T).
Byron Lowry. Waco, Tex., Apr. 19, 1973.
Leon McAuliffe. Rogers, Ark., Dec. 21, 1971 (T); Mar. 2, 1972; Fort Worth, Tex., Mar. 6, 1972 (T); San Antonio, Tex., Mar. 6, 1973 (T); Fort Worth, Tex., Dec. 2, 1973 (T); Dallas, Tex., Dec. 3–4, 1973.
Jack R. McBride. Nocona, Tex., Dec. 25, 1973.
Mary McCall. Nocona, Tex., Dec. 27, 1972.
Martine McCarthy. New York, N.Y., Feb. 28, 1975.
Claude "Whoopy" McCray. Tulsa, Okla., Dec. 28, 1971 (T).
John McEuen. Canyon, Tex., Mar. 14, 1972 (T).
Jamie McIntosh. Tulsa, Okla., Mar. 26, 1972 (T).
Mrs. Jamie McIntosh. Tulsa, Okla., Mar. 26, 1972 (T).
Jennie McKenzie. Fort Worth, Tex., Mar. 28, 1972 (T).
Jim Majors. Turkey, Tex., June 4, 1969 (T).
Johnny Manson. Dallas, Tex., Nov. 29, 1974 (T).
O. W. Mayo. Tulsa, Okla., Dec. 28, 1971 (T); Dec. 31, 1973; May 15, 1975.
Alan Metter. Hollywood, Calif., Dec. 24, 1974.
David Randolph Milsten. Tulsa, Okla., Dec. 29, 1973 (T).
Anderson Minor. Canyon, Tex., Sept. 14, 1972 (T); New Orleans, La., Jan. 1, 1973.
Marvin Montgomery. Dallas, Tex., Nov. 26, 1971 (T).
Tiny Moore. Boulder, Colo., July 25, 1975 (T).
Michael Murphey. Palo Duro Canyon, Tex., Apr. 12, 1974; Canyon Tex., Nov. 22, 1975.
Porter Myers. 6666 Ranch near Guthrie, Tex., June 3, 1969, on deposit in the Southwest Collection, TTU (T).
Mrs. D. A. Neeley. Memphis, Tex., Apr. 5, 1975 (T).
Laura Lee Owens. San Antonio, Tex., Mar. 6, 1973 (T).
John "Knocky" Parker. Interview with Paul Crawford and Ed Kahn, New Orleans, La., Aug. 28, 1963, on deposit at the John Edwards Memorial Foundation, UCLA (T).
Harold Partridge. Munday, Tex., Apr. 1, 1972 (T).
Mrs. Roscoe Partridge. Munday, Tex., Dec. 12, 1974 (T).
Lela Payne. Memphis, Tex., Apr. 5, 1975 (T).
Harry Peebles. Greeley, Colo., July 3, 1975.
Hank Penny. Wichita, Kans., Mar. 1, 1973 (T).
Ada Perry. Tulsa, Okla., Dec. 29, 1971 (T); Dec. 29, 1973.
Lloyd Perryman. North Hollywood, Calif., Dec. 22, 1974.
Rip Ramsey. Amarillo, Tex., Nov. 19, 1971 (T).
Harry Rasmussin. Tulsa, Okla., Dec. 22, 1972.
Leon Rausch. Fort Worth, Tex., Mar. 6, 1972; Mar. 30, 1972 (T); San Antonio, Tex., Mar. 3, 1973; Fort Worth, Tex., Dec. 2, 1973 (T); Nov. 29, 1974.
Ramona Reed. Fort Worth, Tex., Mar. 6, 1972 (T).
Glenn Rhees. San Antonio, Tex., Mar. 6, 1973 (T); Collinsville, Okla., Dec. 30, 1973 (T).
T. W. "Watt" Rice. Lakeview, Tex., Oct. 17, 1971 (T).
Tex Ritter. Fort Worth, Tex., Mar. 6, 1972; San Antonio, Tex., Mar. 6, 1973 (T).
Ike Rude. Akron, Colo., Aug. 14–15, 1969, on deposit in the Southwest Collection, TTU (T).
William Russell. New Orleans, La., Jan. 1, 1973.
Al Samford. Lancaster, Calif., Dec. 23, 1974.
Arthur E. Satherley. Los Angeles, Calif., Jan. 30, 1973; Feb. 8, 26, 1973; Mar. 4, 1973 (T); Dec. 6, 9, 1973; Nov. 8, 1974.
John Selman. Stamford, Tex., June 13, 1969, on deposit in the Southwest Collection, TTU (T).

Eldon Shamblin. Tulsa, Okla., Dec. 4, 1971 (T); Fort Worth, Tex., Mar. 6, 1972 (T); Dec. 2, 1973 (T); Boulder, Colo., July 25, 1975 (T).
Ruby Shamblin. Tulsa, Okla., Dec. 4, 1971; Oklahoma City, Okla., May 4, 1975.
David Shapiro. Tulsa, Okla., May 15, 1975.
George T. Simon. New York, N.Y., Aug. 27, 1975.
Claude Spivey. Hedley, Tex., Oct. 20, 1974.
Clinton Srygley. Memphis, Tex., Apr. 5, 1975 (T).
Samuel Stennis. Amarillo, Tex., Feb. 8, 1972.
Sophie Gay Stilwell. Memphis, Tex., Apr. 5, 1975 (T).
Lerlene Stout. Oklahoma City, Okla., Oct. 9, 1971 (T).
Weldon Stovall. Amarillo, Tex., Oct. 5, 1972.
Glenn Strange. Lovington, N. Mex., Aug. 6–9, 1971.
Alton Stricklin. Cleburne, Tex., Nov. 27, 1971 (T); Fort Worth, Tex., Mar. 6, 1972 (T); San Antonio, Tex., Mar. 6, 1973 (T); Fort Worth, Tex., Dec. 2, 1973 (T); Dallas, Tex., Dec. 3–4, 1973; Fort Worth, Tex., Nov. 29, 1974.
Betty Stricklin. Fort Worth, Tex., Dec. 2, 1973.
Othel Stubb. Turkey, Tex., June 4, 1969 (T).
Ruby Wills Sullivan. Tulsa, Okla., Dec. 28, 1971 (T); Jan. 18, 1975 (T).
A. M. G. "Swede" Swenson. Stamford, Tex., June 8, 1969, on deposit in the Southwest Collection, TTU (T).
W. G. "Bill" Swenson. Stamford, Tex., June 8, 1969, on deposit in the Southwest Collection, TTU (T).
Peter Tamony. Los Angeles, Calif., Sept. 15, 1974; Oct. 5, 1974.
Bobby Taylor. Oklahoma City, Okla., Oct. 9, 1971 (T).
Buck Taylor. Lovington, N. Mex., Aug. 6–9, 1971.
Jack Teagarden. Interview with Richard B. Allen and Paul Crawford, New Orleans, La., Oct. 29, 1959, on deposit in the Archive of New Orleans Jazz, Tulane University (T).
_____. Interview with Richard B. Allen and George Burrows, New Orleans, La., Oct. 30, 1959, on deposit in the Archive of New Orleans Jazz, Tulane University (T).
Les Thompson. Canyon, Tex., Mar. 14, 1972 (T).
Donald C. Townsend. Wichita Falls, Tex., Dec. 31, 1954.
Dot Townsend. Nocona, Tex., Dec. 26, 1972 (T).
Eddie Rush Townsend. Chickasha, Okla., June 10, 1962.
John W. Townsend. Lancaster, Calif., Dec. 28, 1974 (T).
Ernest Tubb. Yuma, Colo., Aug. 14, 1965.
Howard Turner. Tulsa, Okla., Jan. 8, 1976 (T).
Ida Foley Walker. Donie, Tex., Aug. 27, 1975 (T).
J. B. Walling. Fort Worth, Tex., Mar. 6, 1972 (T).
W. R. Walling. Fort Worth, Tex., Mar. 6, 1972 (T).
Bill Ward. Dallas, Tex., Dec. 3–4, 1973; Los Angeles, Calif., Nov. 5, 1974.
O'Neal Watson. Amarillo, Tex., Mar. 17, 1972.
Robert E. Weathers. Waco, Tex., Apr. 19, 1972.
June Whalin. Aledo, Tex., Nov. 9, 1974 (T).
Kermit Whalin. Weatherford, Tex., Nov. 10, 1974 (T).
Wenonah Foley Whitaker. Donie, Tex., Aug. 27, 1975 (T).
Glenn White. Oklahoma City, Okla., Oct. 9, 1971; Nov. 17, 1972; Apr. 4, 1973 (T).
Betty Wills. Fort Worth, Tex., Dec. 30, 1971 (T); Dec. 31, 1971; June 2, 1974 (T). (These dates represent interviews made exclusively with Betty Wills. She also participated in each of my interviews with Bob Wills.)
Billy Jack Wills. Oklahoma City, Okla., Oct. 9, 1971 (T).
Bob Wills. Fort Worth, Tex., Dec. 5, 30–31, 1971 (T); Feb. 28, 1972; Mar. 5–6, 1972 (T); Mar. 12, 1972; Mar. 28–30, 1972 (T); Apr. 14, 23, 1972; Childress, Tex., Apr. 29, 1972; Fort Worth, Tex., May 7, 26, 1972; June 18, 1972; Aug. 10, 1972; Sept. 17, 1972; Oct. 15, 1972; Nov. 12, 1972; Nov. 18, 1972 (T); Nov. 19, 1972; Dec. 10, 1972; Dec. 23–26, 1972 (T); Jan. 7, 1973; Feb. 12, 26, 1973; San Antonio, Tex., Mar. 6, 1973 (T); Fort Worth, Tex., Mar. 12, 25, 1973; Apr. 19–20, 1973 (T); May 17, 1973; June 3,

1973; July 10, 1973; Aug. 10, 23, 1973; Sept. 16, 24, 30, 1973; Oct. 13, 21, 27, 1973; Nov. 3, 6, 17, 20, 23–24, 28, 1973; Dec. 1, 1973; Dec. 2, 1973 (T); Dallas, Tex., Fort Worth, Tex., Dec. 3, 1973 (T).

_____. Interview with Hank Penny on the "Penny Serenade," KGIL, San Fernando, Calif., 1948 (T).

_____. and Tommy Duncan. Interview with T. Texas Tiny, Los Angeles, Calif., 1960 (T).

_____. and Tommy Jackson. Interview with Paul Bowling after Wills's final recording session for Kapp Records, Nashville, Tenn., Feb. 21, 1969 (T).

Edna Wills. Dallas, Tex., Dec. 1, 1973 (T).

Finis E. Wills. Temple, Tex., Sept. 1, 1975 (T).

James Robert Wills II. Fort Worth, Tex., Nov. 23, 1973; Nov. 29, 1974.

Johnnie Lee Wills. Oklahoma City, Okla., Oct. 9, 1971 (T); Tulsa, Okla., Dec. 4, 1971 (T); Dec. 28, 1973 (T).

Luther J. Wills. Oklahoma City, Okla., Oct. 9, 1971 (T); Las Vegas, Nev., Mar. 17, 1973 (T).

Woodie Wood. Oklahoma City, Okla., Mar. 27, 1972 (T).

Wymouth "Tubby" Young. Tulsa, Okla., Apr. 10, 1974.

OTHER AURAL SOURCES

In the study of any art, regardless of the abundant commentary which may exist, the researcher must examine—and in Wills's case hear—the art itself. Fortunately, Bob Wills left a wealth of his own art for such study. I have used the more than 550 individual recordings he made, transcriptions of his radio shows, and tapes of his radio and television performances, dances, commercials, and informal jam sessions on the bus or in hotel rooms.

The numerous tributes which individuals, radio stations, and various groups have made to Wills have often included interviews with him, members of his organization, and others associated with him. In these presentations, Bob's peers often said a good deal about his life, his music, and his influence on American popular music. Despite the trite, sentimental praise, the exaggeration, and the downright misrepresentation that too frequently accompany these tributes, they can nevertheless be of great value. Unfortunately, many of these tapes are not dated, and many of the radio shows do not include call letters of the stations where the broadcasts originated. With the expert help of collectors of Wills material, and by references on the tapes to Wills's music, announcers, incidents, and places, I have been able to assign approximate dates and identify at least the state where a broadcast was made.

During my years of research and writing, I have listened to and profited from hundreds of performers in American popular music. Here I cite only those recordings of Bob Wills which are not included in the Discography, as well as noncommercial recordings of artists who came out of his band, such as Leon McAuliffe, Tommy Duncan, Billy Jack Wills, and Johnnie Lee Wills.

Tapes of all the items in this section are in my library.

Radio and Television

Collectors have located air shots and transcriptions for the following radio and television appearances by Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys.

Radio broadcasts of dances at Cain's Dancing Academy, Tulsa, Okla., KVOO radio, 1940 (Wills's big orchestra).

Armed Forces radio shows, Los Angeles, Calif., about 1945.

Radio shows, Calif., Okla., Tex., 1944–52.
Fresno Roundup, radio broadcasts, Fresno, Calif., 1945–46.
Radio shows, Sacramento, Calif., 1947–48.
Commercial for B. F. Goodrich, probably in Calif., 1948.
Radio broadcast of dance at Cain's Dancing Academy, Tulsa, Okla., 1948.
KBYE radio broadcasts, Oklahoma City, Okla., 1949–50.
Bob Wills Radio Network broadcasts, Oklahoma City, Okla., KBYE radio, late 1949 or early 1950. (John Wills played the fiddle on one of these shows.)
Crosley Transcriptions, Oklahoma City, Okla., KBYE radio, 1950.
Radio broadcasts of dances at MB Corral, Wichita Falls, Tex., KWFT radio, 1950.
Jergens Lotion Transcriptions, Dallas, Tex., WFAA radio, 1950–51.
Radio broadcasts of dances at Bob Wills Ranch House, Dallas, Tex., WFAA radio, 1951.
Radio broadcast of dance at Cain's Dancing Academy, Tulsa, Okla., KVOO radio, 1957.
Television show, Los Angeles, Calif., 1958.
Louisiana Hayride, Shreveport, La., KWKH radio, ca. 1964.

Dances and Shows

Dances are indicated by (D), shows by (S). Except for the first entry, all are by Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys.

Bob Wills with the Lou Walker Band. Amarillo, Tex., 1962 (D).
Calif., 1949 or 1950 (D).
Kiowa, Kans., 1954 or 1955 (D).
Wichita, Kans., 1954 or 1955 (D).
Beaumont, Tex., 1955 (D).
Kiowa, Kans., 1956 (D).
Ozark Jubilee, Springfield, Mo., Mar. 30, 1957 (S).
Boeing Field, Wichita, Kans., Sept. 28, 1958 (D).
MB Corral, Wichita Falls, Tex., 1958 (D).
Fort Worth, Tex., Jan. 5, 1960 (D).
Crystal Springs, Fort Worth, Tex., Feb. 21, 1961 (D).
Waco Terrace Club, Waco, Tex., Feb. 22, 1961 (D).
Museum Club, Flagstaff, Ariz., May 1, 1963 (D).
Panther Hall, Fort Worth, Tex., 1964 (D).
Ben-Dar Club, Ventura, Calif., Nov. 5, 1966 (D).
Panther Hall, Fort Worth, Tex., Feb. 25, 1967 (D).

Movies

Sound track from *Take Me Back to Oklahoma,* 1940.
Songs from Wills movies. See Bob Pinson's Filmusicography.

Rehearsals and Jam Sessions

All are by Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys.

Acetate recordings by a Wills bus driver, 1948.
Private session, Calif., Oct., 1948.
Rehearsal in Hollywood, Calif., 1961, before a Liberty recording session.
"Homecoming" and rehearsal at Bob Wills's home in Fort Worth, Tex., Dec. 2, 1973, the day before his final recording session for United Artists, Dallas, Tex.

Tributes

"A Tribute to Tommy Duncan." KBBQ radio, Burbank, Calif., 1967.
"Tribute to Bob Wills." By Johnny Bond, KBBQ radio, Burbank, Calif., Jan. 11, 1971 (T).

"Tribute to Bob Wills." KIKK radio, Houston, Tex., 1972.
"A Musical Tribute to the Immortal Bob Wills." Tarrant County Convention Center, Fort Worth, Tex., Mar. 6, 1972.
Eldon Shamblin, Harry Fenstemaker, Keith Coleman, Johnny Gimble, Sleepy Johnson, et al. play Bob Wills. Dallas, Tex., Mar. 7, 1972.
"Bob Wills Days." Show at which Wills and his Texas Playboys appeared, Turkey, Tex., Apr. 29, 1972.
"A Tribute to Bob Wills." KBBQ radio, Burbank, Calif., July 3, 1972.
"Bob Wills: The Living Legend." KBUC radio, San Antonio, Tex., Mar., 1973.
"The Bob Wills Tribute." Civic Auditorium, San Antonio, Tex., Mar. 6, 1973.
"Bob Wills Day." Show and unveiling of the Bob Wills monument, Turkey, Tex., Apr. 28, 1973.
"Bob Wills Tribute." By Bill Coleman, KGNC radio, Amarillo, Tex., Apr. 28, 1973.
"Tribute to Bob Wills." By Doug Collins, KDJW radio, Amarillo, Tex., Dec. 27, 1973.
"Bob Wills Reunion." Turkey, Tex., Apr. 27, 1974.
"Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys for the Last Time." A tribute and discussion of Wills's last recording session by Doug Collins and Charles Townsend, KDJW radio, Amarillo, Tex., May 29, 1974.
"Tribute to Bob Wills." By Lee Ross, KPIK radio, Colorado Springs, Colo., Oct. 19, 1974.
Charles Osgood. "News Break." CBS Radio Network, May 14, 1975.

Other Artists

Leon McAuliffe and his Cimarron Boys. Dances at Cimarron Ballroom, Tulsa, Okla., Dec. 3, 30, 1967.
_____. Dance at Elks Club, Lubbock, Tex., Oct. 4, 1969.
_____. Dances at Cotillion Ballroom, Wichita, Kans., Apr. 11, 1970, Dec. 31, 1972.
_____. Dances at Diamond Ballroom, Oklahoma City, Okla., Mar. 17, 1972, Mar. 23, 1973.
_____. Private recordings by McAuliffe's big band made just after World War II.
Leon McAuliffe. Guest appearance at Pops Night with the Tulsa Symphony, Summer, 1972.
Tommy Duncan. Guest apperance at dance in Phoenix, Ariz., 1962, with Bob Fite band.
_____. Guest appearance at dance in Milton-Freewater, Oreg., late 1960s, with Jim Adams band.
Billy Jack Wills and his Western Swing Band. Dance at Wills Point, Calif., 1953.
Johnnie Lee Wills and his Boys. Air shots, KVOO, early 1940s (Johnnie Lee's big orchestra).
_____. Armed Forces Radio Shows, 1950s.
_____. Dance at Crystal Springs, Fort Worth, Tex., ca. 1958.
_____. Dance at Carswell Air Force Base, Fort Worth, Tex., ca. 1958.
_____. Dance at Cimarron Ballroom, Tulsa, Okla., Dec. 8, 1962.
_____. Dance at Navajo Hogan, Colorado Springs, Colo., 1963.
_____. Dance at Oklahoma Cattlemen's Convention, Pawhuska, Okla., June 15, 1973.

MANUSCRIPTS

Bob Wills left an abundance of recordings, and his fans and collectors have gathered an unbelievable number of tape recordings of his live performances. The opposite holds true for written material. No comprehensive body of Wills's papers has been discovered (if any has survived). Most of his fan mail was destroyed. Very few business letters or documents have survived. Nearly all of the correspondence as well as other printed material from the Tulsa years was lost or thrown away. Wills took a great deal of it to California in the early 1940s, including musical arrangements that, according to Eldon Shamblin, were worth several

hundred thousand dollars. All this, plus most of what Wills had accumulated between 1943 and 1956, was destroyed when the ballroom at Wills Point burned. When O. W. Mayo sold Cain's Dancing Academy in 1973, he found little that would be of help to Bob Wills historians.

My search for letters and other documents was greatly facilitated by having access to a number of scrapbooks, all of which were in private hands. The most valuable, of course, was the seven-volume Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook. These volumes were of special value for the later Tulsa years and the decade of the forties. After 1950 the family moved so often they gathered little material for their scrapbook. But they did preserve one of the very few collections of letters I discovered in my research, those which Bob wrote to Betty in the forties (cited in chaps. 16 and 18). Second only to the Bob and Betty Wills Scrapbook in importance was the Ada Perry Scrapbook, which contained the only collection of business letters I was able to find. Few were originals. They were generally carbon copies of letters Ada Perry had typed for Wills or Mayo. Fortunately, they were weighted to the mid-1930s, where Bob and Betty's scrapbook was weakest (the Wills scrapbook for the late twenties and early thirties was destroyed in the fire at Wills Point). The Edna Wills Scrapbook was important for the period up to 1935. It included photographs and clippings of the West Texas, Fort Worth, Waco, and earliest Tulsa years. A work that was of immeasurable value was Ruth Thomason's "Journal of Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys, KVOO, 1940," a day-by-day account of the radio broadcasts and life in general in the Wills band (see chap. 11, n. 16, for a more detailed description of this journal). She made similar volumes for the other Tulsa years, but evidently none has survived. The Durwood Brown Scrapbook was rewarding for the Fort Worth years, as the Kermit and June Whalin Scrapbook was for the Waco and early Tulsa years. The Al Stricklin Scrapbook was very good for the whole of the Tulsa period. For 1936 to 1940, the Joe Ferguson Scrapbook was of value. The Rosetta Wills Arnett Scrapbook was detailed for the years 1939–41 and included the seventeen letters Bob wrote to Mary Lou Parker. The Herman Arnspiger Scrapbook proved excellent for the earliest Fort Worth years and the Tulsa years. Included in some of these scrapbooks were smaller scrapbooks and booklets that fans made and presented to the band. The musicians in Wills's postwar bands rarely kept scrapbooks. Leon Rausch's was an exception; it was especially helpful for the period from 1958 to 1965. Other rewarding collections were the Glenn P. White Scrapbook, which covered Wills's entire career, some of it in depth; the Phillip Banister Scrapbook, which was helpful from Wills's last years in Tulsa to the early 1960s; and the Luther Carden Scrapbook, which was useful for the late sixties and early seventies.

Some of the most valuable source material was in the files of two of Bob Wills's attorneys, and, with Wills's authorization, these files were made available to me. Vernon Goodall and Harold J. Stafford were Wills's attorneys in Waco from 1933 to 1935. Goodall was very gracious in helping me locate and interview people regarding Wills's stay in Waco. My interviews with Goodall himself were also most enlightening. He made available a collection referred to in this book as Legal Papers of Goodall and Stafford, which included all his material relative to the lawsuit with O'Daniel and Burrus Mill, as well as several letters written by

Goodall, Stafford, or Mayo between 1933 and 1935. It also included an interview that Goodall and Stafford made with Wills and members of his band in preparation for the lawsuit (Interview with Wills, Duncan, and Whalin). This interview contained information on the origin and development of the Light Crust Doughboys and Playboys that is probably not available from any other source. I am grateful to David Randolph Milsten, Wills's attorney from the late 1930s to 1975, for supplying copies of material in his files and for his own interview and suggestions. While this material was helpful regarding many aspects of Wills's life and career, it was indispensable for the story of the Wills composition "New San Antonio Rose." Without it, the true story of this song could never have been written.

Sam Gibbs, Wills's manager from the mid-1950s to the end of his career, provided me with a most valuable collection of papers. This included the contracts for Wills's performances, also a volume with Wills's schedule for those appearances, which I have referred to as Sam Gibbs Orchestra Service Datebook. Since Gibbs was a close friend of Wills, his interview (six tapes) was also quite useful.

NEWSPAPERS

As in the case of letters and manuscripts, my newspaper research was greatly aided by the scrapbooks. Since Tulsa was Bob Wills's base of operation for so many years, the newspapers there were the most comprehensive source, though newspapers in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Fort Worth, Dallas, and other cities also carried numerous articles on Wills. These newspaper accounts were often helpful regarding dates and facts. In general, however, my experience in writing this biography has led me to conclude that newspaper accounts of famous personalities must be used with critical caution. This is not necessarily due to the nature of the newspapers and their journalists. Where show-business personalities are concerned, newspapers too often get stories from promoters and publicity agents. Many times, though not every time, these agents give only laudatory and often untrue or inflated accounts of their particular "star." One could not expect them to do otherwise; they are interested in drawing a large crowd, not in presenting an objective history of their client. These stories get reprinted by other papers, and myths are created. However, Ruth Sheldon's articles in the *Tulsa Tribune* in the late 1930s were based on research and are good. Another first-rate article is Marguerite Macklin, "Those Funny Noises Really Come Out of Bob Wills—We've Investigated," *Oklahoma City Advertiser,* Oct. 10, 1949.

MAGAZINES AND BOOKS

Recently a country-music scholar complained that "the paucity of written material on Wills is amazing in light of his popularity and influence." But the dearth of literature on Wills has not been altogether bad for my purposes. It has spared me the turmoil that many biographers endure in trying to get through all the secondary literature. While this literature would have been helpful in giving direction to my research, the absence of it left me free to chart my own course in research and writing. I have probably made mistakes, but they are mine and at

least were not dictated by the dead hand of secondary sources. Most of the secondary literature on Wills has suffered from the same blight as the newspapers. Merrill Jensen, the distinguished historian of the American Revolution, remarked that one historian makes mistakes and another follows in his footsteps. A third follows the second, and the pattern goes on for thirty years or so. This has too often been the case in the writings on Bob Wills. It is especially true of some articles in music and show business journals and in fan magazines—not always, but so much of the time that one should approach most of the literature as if it were. Of the several works on Wills which have risen above this level, some deserve special mention. Ruth Sheldon's biography, *Hubbin' It: The Life of Bob Wills* (Tulsa: Privately published, 1938), is an admirable pioneer effort. It is valuable as social commentary and a criticism of the economy of the 1930s that brought suffering and deprivation to poor people like Wills; it is actually a Great Depression interpretation of Bob Wills. The study that was most helpful to me was Bob Healy, Bob Pinson, and Glenn P. White, "Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys: A Bio-Discography," published in four parts in *Record Research,* No. 79 (Oct., 1966), No. 80 (Nov., 1966), No. 81 (Jan., 1967), and No. 82 (Mar., 1967). Despite a few factual errors, one of the best essays in print on Wills is Willie Nelson, "A Tribute to Bob Wills," *Country Music,* 2, no. 12 (Aug., 1974), 68–73. Jerry Zolten, "Western Swingtime Music: A Cool Breeze in the American Desert," *Sing Out!,* 23, no. 2 (May–June, 1974), 2–5, is filled with provocative observations concerning western swing generally and with valuable insights into Wills's music and style. Bill C. Malone's excellent *Country Music, U.S.A.: A Fifty-Year History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968) depicts the influence of Wills on country music. For a brief account of Wills's life, with emphasis on his music and style, see Charles R. Townsend, "Homecoming: Reflections on Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys, 1915–1973," a booklet accompanying the 1974 album by Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys, *For the Last Time,* United Artists UA-LA216-J2. Another brief sketch of Wills's life, which emphasizes his creation of western swing, is Townsend, "Bob Wills," in *Stars of Country Music: Uncle Dave Macon to Johnny Rodriguez,* edited by Bill C. Malone and Judith McCulloh (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), pp. 157–178.

The Bob Wills Recordings: A Comprehensive Discography

Interest among western swing aficionados in researching Bob Wills's recordings has existed for over two decades. It was during the early 1950s that the first Bob Wills discography appeared in print. Compiled by collector Irving Anderson, it was printed on legal-sized paper and, as a labor of love, was not intended for sale, but gladly given to other collectors sharing the same interest. All of the Wills recordings up to that time were listed, with master numbers (if known) and record release numbers, but no "take" information. Personnel data were not given either, except for vocalist credits. Country music discographies were virtually nonexistent at that time, so Anderson's effort was a pioneering one.

By the mid-to-late 1950s, comprehensive discographies of country music performers began appearing in record collector journals, such as *International Discophiles, Disc Collector,* and *Folk Style.* It was the late John Edwards's detailed discography of Jimmie Rodgers's recordings in *International Discophiles* (Fall, 1955) that started the ball rolling and inspired others to follow suit.

Strongly desiring to see a full-blown Bob Wills discography appear in such a journal, discographers Bob Healy, Glenn White, and Bob Pinson began the project in 1959. They gathered data over a period of several years by visiting or corresponding with ex–band members and by writing to record companies involved in Wills's career. All these inputs, however conflicting they may have been, were channeled into Bob Healy's hands. He carefully assimilated them into the final product which appeared in *Record Research* (Nos. 79–82, from October and November, 1966, and January and March, 1967, respectively). This discography covered Wills's recording career from its inception until 1964, when Wills was recording for the Longhorn label.

The only other published research on Wills's recordings was "Bob Wills: Discography of the Columbia Years, 1935–1947," a compilation by Danny R. Hatcher in the Country Music Foundation's *Journal of Country Music* (3, nos. 3–4, Fall–Winter, 1973). This article expanded the Columbia portion of the *Record Research* discography to include take numbers for each release. Also included were record release dates for items released between 1942 and 1949 by Columbia. These dates were gleaned from the personal recording logs of pioneer A&R director Art Satherley, who had recently donated them to the Country Music Foundation Library and Media Center in Nashville.

The discography presented here updates and expands all the others. Its inclusion as an adjunct to Charles Townsend's biography fulfills the need for a single reference source on the career of Bob Wills. This is also the first comprehensive bio-discography published about a country music figure. All record releases through mid-November, 1975, are included.

The format employed herein is largely self-explanatory, but a few points deserve further comment:

SESSION PERSONNEL: In the absence of definitive data, some musicians are credited through a consensus of opinion among various other participating musicians who were interviewed. Firm information disproving any data presented in this discography is solicited.

MASTER NO.: Master numbers are suffixed with take numbers where known. For example, take number two was employed in the record release for master number DAL 126, while take number one was used with DAL 127. Master numbers in parentheses are ones assigned subsequent to the recording sessions and usually do not indicate recording sequence.

TITLE & COMPOSER CREDIT: Titles and composers are listed as they appear on initial record releases. No attempt has been made to correct misspellings, however obvious they may be.

LEAD VOCAL: Usually only the lead vocalist is listed. By and large, no attempt has been made to determine group vocalists.

The compiler is very grateful to the many who provided assistance, not only with this updated discography, but with the original undertaking as well. Thanks to all the musicians who patiently answered inquiries, including the man at the helm, the late Bob Wills, along with Danny Alguire, Tommy Allsup, Jesse Ashlock, the late Noel Boggs, the late Cecil Brower, Keith Coleman, Johnny Cuviello, the late Tommy Duncan, Johnny Gimble, Darrell Glenn, Bonnie Haggard, Sleepy Johnson, the late Millard Kelso, Leon McAuliffe, Laura Lee McBride, Tiny Moore, Bill Mounce, Monte Mountjoy, Leon Rausch, Herb Remington, Eldon Shamblin, Al Stricklin, the late Louis Tierney, "Fiddlin' " Bob White, and Woodie Wood. Many recording industry people diligently searched their file cabinets, as well as their memories, to help fill important gaps. In this category, thanks go to Frank Driggs of RCA, Edward Greene of MGM, John Ierardi and Kathy Keep of United Artists, Dean May of Acuff-Rose, Martine McCarthy of CBS Records, Ken Nelson of Capitol Records, Edward Peters of the American Federation of Musicians Pension Fund, Sheryl Solakian (formerly of United Artists), pioneer A&R man Art Satherley, and Corky Wilson of MCA. Last, but certainly not least, are the many fellow collectors and historians who all contributed their valuable insights to the discography. Included here are Luther Carden, the late Howard Cole, Eugene W. Earle, Wayne Glenn, Ken Griffis, Bob Healy, Lloyd Hendrick, Alan Heward, Keith Kolby, David Kressley, Bill Legere, Marcus Mallard, Gerhard Moerke, Fred Sandrock, Don Schaefer, Elizabeth Schlappi, David Stricklin, Masumi Tsuchiya, Glenn White, and Denver Whitten. And, of course, thanks to Charles Townsend for "gettin' it all together"!

BOB PINSON

ABBREVIATIONS OF RECORD LABELS

AFRS - Armed Forces Radio Services
An - The Antones
AuFe - (Australian) Festival
AuRZ - (Australian) Regal Zonophone
Bb - Bluebird
BW - Bob Wills
CanCo - (Canadian) Columbia
CanSu - (Canadian) Sunrise
CMA - Country Music Association
CMRC - Country Music Record Club (Division of Starday)
Co - Columbia
CoCSP-CMM - Columbia Special Products (Country Music Magazine)
Cq - Conqueror
De - Decca
EngCBS - (English) CBS
EngRZ - (English) Regal Zonophone
Ep - Epic
Eucom - European Command
Ha - Harmony
HH - Hillbilly Heaven
IrRZ - (Irish) Regal Zonophone
JaLi - (Japanese) Liberty
JaMCA - (Japanese) MCA
Ka - Kapp
Li - Liberty
LBC - Library Bi-Centennial (Library of Congress)
Lo - Longhorn
Met - Metro
MW - Montgomery Ward
Ok - Okeh
OT - Old Timey
RD - Reader's Digest
St - Starday
SGCA - Steel Guitar Club of America
Su - Sunset
UA - United Artists
Vi - Victor
Vo - Vocalion
WGeMCA - (West German) MCA
WGeUA - (West German) United Artists

MASTER NO.	TITLE & COMPOSER CREDIT	LEAD VOCAL	78 RPM	45 RPM	33 1/3 RPM

BRUNSWICK RECORDS

Dallas, Texas
November 1, 1929

Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Herman Arnspiger, guitar.

TDA 569	GULF COAST BLUES	Instrumental	Unissued		
TDA 570	WILLS BREAKDOWN	Instrumental	Unissued		

NOTE: Brunswick recording ledger gives artist credit to: Jim Rob Wills and Herman Arnspiger.

VICTOR RECORDS

Jefferson Hotel
Dallas, Texas
February 9, 1932

Session Personnel: Milton Brown, vocal; Durwood Brown, guitar; Bob Wills, fiddle; C. G. "Sleepy" Johnson, tenor guitar.

BVE 70670-1	SUNBONNET SUE (Milton Brown)	M. Brown	Vi 23653, Bb 5257, MW 4416 & 4757, CanSu 3340		
BVE 70671-1	NANCY JANE (Milton Brown)	M. Brown; + D. Brown on chorus	Vi 23653, Bb 5257, MW 4416 & 4757, CanSu 3340		

NOTE: Artist credit to Fort Worth Doughboys on all releases except MW 4757, which is credited to Milton Brown and his Musical Brownies.

BRUNSWICK/A.R.C./COLUMBIA RECORDS

Dallas, Texas
September 23, 1935

Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Herman Arnspiger, guitar; Jesse Ashlock, fiddle; William E. "Smokey" Dacus, drums; Tommy Duncan, vocal; Art Haines, fiddle & trombone; C. G. "Sleepy" Johnson, guitar; Son Lansford, bass; Leon McAuliffe, steel guitar; Robert "Zeb" McNally, saxophone; Ruth McMaster, fiddle (on "Blue River" only); Al Stricklin, piano; Johnnie Lee Wills, banjo.

DAL 126-2	OSAGE STOMP (Wills)	Instrumental	Vo & Ok 03096, Co 37701 & 20280	Co KG32416, CoSP-CMM P212922
DAL 127-1	GET WITH IT (Wills - Duncan)	T. Duncan	Vo & Ok 03096, Co 37701 & 20280	
DAL 128	PRAY FOR THE LIGHTS TO GO OUT		Unissued	
DAL 129-2	I CAN'T GIVE YOU ANYTHING BUT LOVE (Fields - McHugh)	L. McAuliffe	Vo & Ok 03264, Co 37703 & 20282	
DAL 130-1	SPANISH TWO STEP (Bob Wills)	Instrumental	Vo & Ok 03230, Co 20498	Ha HL7292, Co KG32416, CoSP-CMM P212922
DAL 131-1	MAIDEN'S PRAYER (Bob Wills)	Instrumental	Vo & Ok 03924, Co 20473, CanCo 1157	Co KG32416, CoSP-CMM P212922
DAL 132-1	WANG WANG BLUES (Wood - Mueller - Johnson - Busse)	Instrumental	Vo & Ok 03173	An LP6000 (10")
DAL 133-2	ST. LOUIS BLUES (Handy)	B. Wills; + T. Duncan talking	Vo & Ok 03076, Co 37605 & 20204	
DAL 134-1	GOOD OLD OKLAHOMA (No CC)	T. Duncan	Vo & Ok 03086, Co 37607 & 20206	
DAL 135-2	BLUE RIVER (St. Leon - Allen)	C. G. Johnson; + B. Wills & T. Duncan	Vo & Ok 03230	An LP6010 (10")
DAL 136-1	MEXICALI ROSE (Stone - Tenney)	B. Wills	Vo & Ok 03086, Co 37607 & 20206, Cq 9169	Co KG32416, CoSP-CMM P212922
DAL 137-1	I AIN'T GOT NOBODY (Graham - Williams)	T. Duncan	Vo & Ok 03206, An 102	
DAL 138-2	NEVER NO MORE BLUES (No CC)	T. Duncan	Vo & Ok 03264, Co 37703 & 20282	OT 105

MASTER NO.	TITLE & COMPOSER CREDIT	LEAD VOCAL	78 RPM	45 RPM	33 1/3 RPM
Dallas, Texas September 24, 1935					
DAL 139-1	WHO WALKS IN WHEN I WALK OUT (Hoffman - Goodhart - Freed)	L. McAuliffe	Vo & Ok 03206, An 102		An LP6000 (10"), LBC 5
DAL 140-2	OLD FASHIONED LOVE (Mack - Johnson)	B. Wills	Vo & Ok 03295, Co 37616 & 20215		Co KG32416
DAL 141-2	OKLAHOMA RAG (No CC)	Instrumental	Vo & Ok 03295, Co 37616 & 20215		
DAL 142-1	BLACK AND BLUE RAG (No CC)	Instrumental	Vo & Ok 03139, Co 37612 & 20211		CoSP-CMM P212922
DAL 143-2	SITTIN' ON TOP OF THE WORLD (No CC)	B. Wills	Vo & Ok 03139, Co 37612 & 20211		Co KG32416
DAL 144-1	FOUR OR FIVE TIMES (Hellman - Gay)	B. Wills	Vo & Ok 03076, Co 37605 & 20204		
DAL 145-2	I CAN'T BE SATISFIED (Willie Broonzy)	T. Duncan	Vo & Ok 03173		An LP6010 (10"), LBC 5
Dallas, Texas September 25, 1935	Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; C. G. "Sleepy" Johnson, guitar.				
DAL 146-1	SMITH'S REEL (No CC)	Instrumental	Banner, Melotone, Oriole, Perfect, Romeo 6-11-58		
DAL 147-1	HARMONY (No CC)	Instrumental	Banner, Melotone, Oriole, Perfect, Romeo 6-11-58		
DAL 148	TULSA WALTZ	Instrumental	Unissued		
DAL 149	WALTZ IN D	Instrumental	Unissued		
NOTE: Artist credit to Bob Wills and Sleepy Johnson on above releases.					
Chicago, Illinois September 29, 1936	Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Herman Arnspiger, guitar; Jesse Ashlock, fiddle; William E. "Smokey" Dacus, drums; Ray DeGeer, saxophone & clarinet; Tommy Duncan, vocal; Joe Ferguson, bass; C. G. "Sleepy" Johnson, guitar & fiddle; Leon McAuliffe, steel guitar; Robert "Zeb" McNally, saxophone; Everett Stover, trumpet; Al Stricklin, piano; Johnnie Lee Wills, banjo.				
C 1475-2	SHE'S KILLING ME (No CC)	T. Duncan	Vo & Ok 03424, Co 37622 & 20221		
C 1476-1	WEARY OF THE SAME OL' STUFF (No CC)	J. Ashlock	Vo & Ok 03343, Cq 9041		
C 1477-2	NO MATTER HOW SHE DONE IT (Whittaker)	J. Ferguson	Vo & Ok 03537, Co 37625 & 20224		
C 1478-2	BLUIN' THE BLUES (Ragas)	Instrumental	Vo & Ok 03614		An LP6000 (10")
C 1479-1	STEEL GUITAR RAG (Leon McAuliffe)	Instrumental	Ok 03394		
C 1479-2	STEEL GUITAR RAG (Leon McAuliffe)	Instrumental	Vo & Ok 03394, Co 37620 & 20219		Ha HL7292, Co KG32416, OT 105, CoSP-CMM P212922
C 1480-2	GET ALONG HOME CINDY (No CC)	T. Duncan	Vo & Ok 03451, Co 37623 & 20222		
C 1481-2	TROUBLE IN MIND (Richard M. Jones)	T. Duncan	Vo & Ok 03343, Co 37306, 20109, Cq 9041, CanCo 6366	Co B2805 (EP)	Co HL9003 (10"), Ha HL7036, Ha HS11358, Co 3-33020 (7"), Ep BG3378
C 1482-2	WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH THE MILL (No CC)	T. Duncan & B. Wills	Vo & Ok 03424, Co 37622, 20221		OT 117
C 1483-2	SUGAR BLUES (Fletcher - Williams)	B. Wills	Vo & Ok 03361, Co 37619 & 20218		
C 1484-2	BASIN STREET BLUES (Williams)	T. Duncan	Vo & Ok 03344, Co 37618 & 20217, Cq 9040		
C 1485-2	RED HOT GAL OF MINE (Strickland - Mayo)	T. Duncan	Vo & Ok 03344, Co 37618 & 20217, Cq 9040		
C 1486	DARKTOWN STRUTTERS' BALL	T. Duncan & B. Wills (duet)	Unissued		
C 1487-1	TOO BUSY (Miller - Cohn)	Instrumental	Vo & Ok 03537, Co 37625 & 20224		
C 1488-1	BACK HOME AGAIN IN INDIANA (Macdonald - Hanley)	T. Duncan	Vo & Ok 03578, CanCo 910		An LP6000 (10")
C 1489	THERE'S A QUAKER GIRL DOWN IN OLD QUAKER TOWN		Unissued		
C 1490	AWAY OUT THERE		Unissued		
C 1491	JUST FRIENDS	Instrumental	Unissued		
C 1492	CRIPPLED TURKEY	Instrumental	Unissued		

MASTER NO.	TITLE & COMPOSER CREDIT	LEAD VOCAL	78 RPM	45 RPM	33 1/3 RPM
Chicago, Illinois September 30, 1936					
C 1493-1	FAN IT (Jaxon)	J. L. Wills	Vo & Ok 03361, Co 37619 & 20218		
C 1494	RED HEAD		Unissued		
C 1495-2	MEAN MAMA BLUES (No CC)	T. Duncan	Vo & Ok 03492, Co 37624 & 20223		
C 1496	THERE'S NO DISAPPOINTMENT IN HEAVEN	B. Wills	Unissued		
C 1497	ROCKIN' ALONE IN AN OLD ROCKIN' CHAIR		Unissued		
C 1498	BEAR CAT MAMA		Unissued		
C 1499	SLEEPY TIME IN SLEEPY HOLLOW		Unissued		
C 1500-1	BRING IT ON DOWN TO MY HOUSE (No CC)	T. Duncan & B. Wills	Vo & Ok 03492, Co 37624 & 20223		
C 1501	I'VE GOT THE WONDER WHERE SHE WENT		Unissued		
C 1502	ROLL ALONG KENTUCKY MOON		Unissued		
C 1503-2	RIGHT OR WRONG (Gillespie - Sizemore - Biese)	T. Duncan	Vo & Ok 03451, Co 37623 & 20222		
C 1504-1	SWING BLUES #1 (No CC)	T. Duncan & B. Wills	Vo & Ok 03394, Co 37620 & 20219		OT 105
C 1505-2	SWING BLUES #2 (No CC)	B. Wills & T. Duncan	Vo & Ok 03578		An LP6010 (10")
Dallas, Texas June 7, 1937	Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Herman Arnspiger, guitar; Jesse Ashlock, fiddle; Cecil Brower, fiddle; William E. "Smokey" Dacus, drums; Ray DeGeer, saxophone & clarinet; Tommy Duncan, vocal; Joe Ferguson, bass; C. G. "Sleepy" Johnson, guitar; Leon McAuliffe, steel guitar; Robert "Zeb" McNally, saxophone; Tiny Mott, saxophone; Everett Stover, trumpet; Al Stricklin, piano; Johnnie Lee Wills, banjo.				
DAL 212-2	WHITE HEAT (No CC)	Instrumental	Vo & Ok 03614		An LP6010 (10"), CoSP-CMM P212922
DAL 213	I'LL GET MINE		Unissued		
DAL 214-1	DEDICATED TO YOU (Cahn - Chaplin - Zaret)	B. Wills	Vo & Ok 03597		An LP6010 (10")
DAL 215-1	PLAYBOY STOMP (No CC)	Instrumental	Vo 03854		
DAL 216-3	STEEL GUITAR STOMP (No CC)	Instrumental	Vo & Ok 03997, Co 37628 & 20227, Cq 9039		OT 105
DAL 217-1	ROSETTA (Hines - Woods)	B. Wills	Vo & Ok 03659, An 103		
DAL 218-2	BLEEDING HEARTED BLUES (Austin)	T. Duncan	Vo & Ok 03597		An LP6000 (10")
DAL 219	DOWN HEARTED BLUES		Unissued		
DAL 220	OLD JELLY ROLL BLUES		Unissued		
Dallas, Texas June 8, 1937					
DAL 221-2	BLUE YODEL #1 (J. Rodgers)	T. Duncan			Co KG32416
DAL 222	TULSA STOMP	Instrumental	Unissued		
DAL 223	THERE ARE TWO SIDES TO EVERY STORY		Unissued		
DAL 224	THIRTY FIRST STREET BLUES		Unissued		
DAL 225	OH! YOU BEAUTIFUL DOLL		Unissued		
DAL 226	MEXICALI ROSE		Unissued		
DAL 227-2	TIE ME TO YOUR APRON STRINGS AGAIN (Shay - Goodwin)	T. Duncan & B. Wills (duet)	Vo 03854		
DAL 228	KEEP KNOCKING BUT YOU CAN'T COME IN		Unissued		
DAL 229-1	NEVER NO MORE HARD TIMES BLUES (No CC)	T. Duncan	Co 20473, CanCo 1157, EngRZ ME79, IrRZ 1.2.1365		OT105
DAL 229-2	NEVER NO MORE HARD TIMES BLUES (No CC)	T. Duncan	Vo & Ok 03924		
DAL 230-1	SUNBONNET SUE (Milton Brown)	T. Duncan	Vo & Ok 03997, Co 37628 & 20227, Cq 9039		

MASTER NO.	TITLE & COMPOSER CREDIT	LEAD VOCAL	78 RPM	45 RPM	33 1/3 RPM
DAL 230-2	SUNBONNET SUE (Milton Brown)	T. Duncan	Vo 03997		
DAL 231	LA GOLONDRINA	Instrumental	Unissued		
DAL 232	AT THE BARN DANCE		Unissued		
DAL 233	See session for June 9, 1937.				
DAL 234	DALLAS BLUES	Instrumental	Unissued		
Dallas, Texas June 9, 1937					
DAL 233	THERE IS A TAVERN IN THE TOWN		Unissued		
DAL 234	See session for June 8, 1937.				
DAL 235-2	THE NEW ST. LOUIS BLUES (W. C. Handy)	B. Wills; + T. Duncan talking	Vo & Ok 03693, Co 37712 & 20289		
DAL 236	LOVELESS LOVE	B. Wills	Unissued		
DAL 237-2	I'M A DING DONG DADDY (FROM DUMAS) (Phil Baxter)	T. Duncan & B. Wills	Vo & Ok 03659, An 103		
DAL 238	I WISH I COULD SHIMMY LIKE MY SISTER KATE		Unissued		
DAL 239-1	OOZLIN' DADDY BLUES (No CC)	T. Duncan	Vo & Ok 03693, Co 37712 & 20289		
Dallas, Texas May 16, 1938	Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Jesse Ashlock, fiddle; William E. "Smokey" Dacus, drum; Tommy Duncan, vocal; Joe Ferguson, bass; C. G. "Sleepy" Johnson, banjo; Charles Laughton, saxophone, trumpet & clarinet; Leon McAuliffe, steel guitar; Robert "Zeb" McNally, saxophone; Eldon Shamblin, lead guitar; Everett Stover, trumpet; Al Stricklin, piano.				
DAL 562-1	BLACK RIDER (No CC)	T. Duncan	Ok 04132		
DAL 562-2	BLACK RIDER (No CC)	T. Duncan	Vo & Ok 04132		
DAL 563-1	EVERYBODY DOES IT IN HAWAII (McWilliams - Rodgers)	T. Duncan	Vo & Ok 04132		
DAL 564	I'M FREE FROM THE CHAIN GANG NOW	T. Duncan	Unissued		
DAL 565-2	ALEXANDER'S RAGTIME BAND (Berlin)	L. McAuliffe	Vo & Ok 04275, Cq 9156		An LP6010 (10")
DAL 566-1	BLUE PRELUDE (Jenkins - Bishop)	J. Ferguson	Vo & Ok 05333		
DAL 567	DOWN HEARTED BLUES	B. Wills	Unissued		
DAL 568	LITTLE HEAVEN OF THE SEVEN SEAS	Instrumental	Unissued		
DAL 569-1	SOPHISTICATED HULA (Bright)	Instrumental	Vo & Ok 05333		
DAL 570-1	PRAY FOR THE LIGHTS TO GO OUT (Tunnah - Skidmore)	B. Wills	Vo & Ok 05401, Cq 9718, An 100		
DAL 571-1	GAMBLING POLKA DOT BLUES (Rodgers - Hall)	T. Duncan	Vo & Ok 04275, Cq 9156		An LP6000 (10")
DAL 572-1	KEEP KNOCKING (BUT YOU CAN'T COME IN) (No CC)	L. McAuliffe	Vo & Ok 04184, Cq 9070, Co 37629 & 20228		
DAL 573-1	LOVELESS LOVE (Handy)	B. Wills	Vo & Ok 04387		An LP6000 (10")
Dallas, Texas May 17, 1938	Personnel Note: Bob Wills is absent today.				
DAL 574-2	OH, LADY BE GOOD (I. Gershwin - G. Gershwin)	Instrumental	Vo & Ok 04515, Co 37728 & 20305		
DAL 575-1	WAY DOWN UPON THE SWANEE RIVER (Foster)	Instrumental	Vo & Ok 04387		
DAL 576	DON'T STOP LOVING ME	J. Ferguson	Unissued		
DAL 577-1	OH YOU BEAUTIFUL DOLL (Brown - Ayer)	T. Duncan	Vo & Ok 04515, Co 37728 & 20305		
DAL 578-1	MOONLIGHT AND ROSES (Black - Moret)	Trio	Vo & Ok 04439, Cq 9155, Co 37727 & 20304		
DAL 579	WILLIAM TELL	Instrumental	Unissued		
DAL 580-1	I WISH I COULD SHIMMY LIKE MY SISTER KATE (Piron)	J. Ashlock	Vo & Ok 04439, Cq 9155, Co 37727 & 20304		

MASTER NO.	TITLE & COMPOSER CREDIT	LEAD VOCAL	78 RPM	45 RPM	33 1/3 RPM
DAL 581	MISSISSIPPI DELTA BLUES	T. Duncan	Unissued		
DAL 582	TULSA STOMP (Bob Wills)	Instrumental	Vo & Ok 04325, Cq 9400, Co 37725 & 20302		
DAL 583-1	EMPTY BED BLUES (Johnson)	T. Duncan	Vo & Ok 04184, Cq 9070, Co 37629 & 20228		
DAL 584	OH, YOU PRETTY WOMAN	L. McAuliffe	Unissued		
DAL 585-1	LITTLE RED HEAD (Everett Stover)	J. Ferguson	Vo & Ok 04325, Co 37725 & 20302		
DAL 586-1	I'LL SEE YOU IN MY DREAMS (G. Kahn - I. Jones)	C. G. Johnson			Co KG32416

Dallas, Texas
November 28, 1938

Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Herman Arnspiger, guitar; Jesse Ashlock, fiddle; William E. "Smokey" Dacus, drums; Tommy Duncan, vocal; Joe Ferguson, bass & saxophone; C. G. "Sleepy" Johnson, fiddle; Son Lansford, bass; Leon McAuliffe, steel guitar; Robert "Zeb" McNally, saxophone; Tiny Mott, saxophone; Eldon Shamblin, lead guitar; Everett Stover, trumpet; Al Stricklin, piano; Johnnie Lee Wills, banjo.

DAL 615-1	SAN ANTONIO ROSE (No CC) NOTE: On Co GP19 the label incorrectly lists the song as "New San Antonio Rose" with Tommy Duncan credited as vocalist.	Instrumental	Vo & Ok 04755, Cq 9226, Co 37009, 20035 & 52029, EngRZ ME79, IrRZ 1.2.1365, V-Disc 115	Co B2805 & 4-52029	Ha HL7036, Ha HS11358, Co GP19 (see note), Ep BG-33782
DAL 616-1	LITTLE GIRL, GO ASK YOUR MAMA (No CC)	Instrumental	Vo & Ok 04625, Cq 9210, Co 37731 & 20308		OT 105
DAL 617-1	CAROLINA IN THE MORNING (Kahn - Donaldson)	Instrumental	Vo & Ok 05079, Cq 9354, Co 37735 & 20312		
DAL 618-1	THE CONVICT AND THE ROSE (Chapin)	T. Duncan	Vo & Ok 04755, Co 37009 & 20035, Cq 9226		Ha HL7036, Ha HS11358, Ep BG-33782
DAL 618-2	NOTE: This "#2 take" appears on some Conqueror releases. However, this is merely a recording laboratory re-mastering of the take #1 recording.				
DAL 619-1	SILVER BELLS (No CC)	Instrumental	Vo & Ok 04934, Cq 9721, Co 20498		Co KG32416, CoSP-CMM P212922
DAL 620-1	DREAMY EYES WALTZ (No CC)	Instrumental	Vo & Ok 05161		
DAL 621-1	BEAUMONT RAG (No CC)	Instrumental	Vo & Ok 04999, Cq 9718, Co 37642 & 20241		OT 117
DAL 622-1	TWINKLE, TWINKLE LITTLE STAR (No CC)	Instrumental	Vo & Ok 05401, An 104		
DAL 623	See session for November 29, 1938.				
DAL 624	See session for November 29, 1938.				
DAL 625-1	IF I COULD BRING BACK MY BUDDY (No CC)	Trio	Vo & Ok 05228		
DAL 626-1	WHOA BABE (Clinton)	L. McAuliffe	Vo & Ok 04625, Cq 9210, Co 37731 & 20308		

Dallas, Texas
November 29, 1938

DAL 623-1	IDA RED (No CC)	T. Duncan	Vo & Ok 05079, Co 37735 & 20312		
DAL 624-1	YEARNING (Davis - Burke)	B. Wills	Vo & Ok 04934, Cq 9721		
DAL 625	See session for November 28, 1938.				
DAL 626	See session for November 28, 1938.				
DAL 627-1	I WONDER IF YOU FEEL THE WAY I DO (No CC)	T. Duncan	Vo & Ok 04566, Cq 9206, Co 37637 & 20236, CanCo 983, AuRZ G23790		OT 117
DAL 628	See session for November 30, 1938.				
DAL 629	See session for November 30, 1938.				
DAL 630	See session for November 30, 1938.				
DAL 631-1	PROSPERITY SPECIAL (No CC)	Instrumental	Vo & Ok 05228		
DAL 632	See session for November 30, 1938.				
DAL 633-1	DRUNKARD'S BLUES (No CC)	T. Duncan	Vo & Ok 05282, Cq 9604, Co 37739 & 20316		

MASTER NO.	TITLE & COMPOSER CREDIT	LEAD VOCAL	78 RPM	45 RPM	33 1/3 RPM
DAL 634-1	YOU'RE OKAY (Parrish - Bloom)	J. Ferguson	Vo & Ok 04839, Cq 9213, Co 37639 & 20238		OT 116
DAL 635-1	LIZA PULL DOWN THE SHADES (No CC)	Instrumental	Vo & Ok 04839, Cq 9213, Co 37639 & 20238		OT 116
Dallas, Texas November 30, 1938					
DAL 628-1	THAT'S WHAT I LIKE 'BOUT THE SOUTH (Razaf)	L. McAuliffe	Vo & Ok 04566, Cq 9206, Co 37637 & 20236, CanCo 983		Co KG32416, CoSP-CMM P212922
DAL 629-1	MY WINDOW FACES THE SOUTH (Silver - Parish - Livingston)	L. McAuliffe	Vo & Ok 05161, An 104 & 501		
DAL 630-1	THE WALTZ YOU SAVED FOR ME (Kahn - King - Flindt)	T. Duncan	Vo & Ok 04999, Cq 9354, Co 37642 & 20241		Co KG32416
DAL 631	See session for November 29, 1938.				
DAL 632-1	DON'T LET THE DEAL GO DOWN (No CC)	Instrumental	Vo & Ok 05282, Co 37739 & 20316		
DAL 633	See session for November 29, 1938.				
DAL 634	See session for November 29, 1938.				
DAL 635	See session for November 29, 1938.				
Saginaw, Texas April 15, 1940	Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Herman Arnspiger, guitar; Jesse Ashlock, fiddle; William E. "Smokey" Dacus, drums; Tommy Duncan, vocal; Joe Ferguson (possibly), saxophone; Don Harlan, saxophone; Wayne Johnson, saxophone & clarinet; Son Lansford, bass; Tubby Lewis, trumpet; Leon McAuliffe, steel guitar; Robert "Zeb" McNally, saxophone; Tiny Mott, saxophone; Eldon Shamblin, lead guitar; Everett Stover, trumpet; Al Stricklin, piano; Louis Tierney, fiddle & saxophone; Johnnie Lee Wills, banjo.				
DAL 968-2	YOU DON'T LOVE ME (BUT I'LL ALWAYS CARE) (Wayne)	T. Duncan	Vo & Ok 05597, Cq 9720		
DAL 969-2	NO WONDER (Davis - Burke)	B. Wills	Vo & Ok 05597, Cq 9720		
DAL 970-1	LONE STAR RAG (Wills)	Instrumental	Ok 05637, Cq 9604, Co 37749 & 20326, CanCo 910		
DAL 971-2	THERE'S GOING TO BE A PARTY (Wills)	T. Duncan	Ok 05905, Cq 9386		
DAL 972-1	I DON'T LOV'A NOBODY (Wills)	Instrumental	Ok 05637, Co 37749 & 20326		
DAL 973-2	THAT BROWNSKIN GAL (Wills)	Instrumental	Ok 05753, Cq 9394		
DAL 974-1	CORRINE CORRINA (Williams - Chatman)	B. Wills	Ok 06530, Co 37428 & 20155, CanCo 550		Co KG32416, CoSP-CMM P212922
DAL 975-1B	LET ME CALL YOU SWEETHEART (Whitson - Friedman)	B. Wills	Co 20513		
DAL 976-2	BLUE BONNET RAG (Wills)	Instrumental	Vo & Ok 05523, Co 37647 & 20246		
DAL 977	See session for April 16, 1940.				
DAL 978-2	TIME CHANGES EVERYTHING (Wills)	T. Duncan	Ok 05753, Cq 9394, Co 37308 & 20111, CanCo 6368	Co B2805 (EP)	Co HL9003 (10"), Co KG32416, Ha HL7036, Ha HS11358, Co 3-33020 (7"), AFRS W-260 (16"), Ep BG33782, CoSP-CMM P212922
DAL 979-2	MEDLEY OF SPANISH WALTZES (1) LA GOLONDRINA (Serradell) (2) LADY OF SPAIN (Reaves - Evans) (3) CIELITO LINDO (No CC)	Trio	Vo & Ok 05523, Cq 9603, Co 37647 & 20246		
Saginaw, Texas April 16, 1940					
DAL 977-2	BOB WILLS SPECIAL (Wills)	Instrumental	Ok 05694, Cq 9400, Co 37014 & 20040, CanCo 1026		Ha HL7345
DAL 978	See session for April 15, 1940.				
DAL 979	See session for April 15, 1940.				
DAL 980-1 or 980-1a	BIG BEAVER (Wills)	Instrumental	Ok 05905, Cq 9386		
DAL 980-1b or 980-1c	BIG BEAVER (Wills)	Instrumental	Co 37308 & 20111, CanCo 6368		Co HL9003 (10"), Ha HL7036, Ha HS11358, Co KG32416, Ep BG33782, CoSP-CMM P212922

MASTER NO.	TITLE & COMPOSER CREDIT	LEAD VOCAL	78 RPM	45 RPM	33 1/3 RPM
DAL 981-1	NEW SAN ANTONIO ROSE (Wills)	T. Duncan	Ok 05694, Cq 9603, Co 37014, 37306, 20040, 20109 & 52029, CanCo 1026 & 6366, V Disc 115	Co 4-52029	Co KG32416, Co B3P10173-5, CoSP-CMM P212922
DAL 981-?	NEW SAN ANTONIO ROSE (Wills)	T. Duncan		Co B2805 (EP)	Co HL9003 (10"), Ha HL7036, Ha HS11358, Ep BG33782
DAL 982	WAIT 'TIL YOU SEE	B. Wills	Unissued		

NOTE: Despite the use of DAL (Dallas) master number prefixes for this session, the location was probably Burrus Mill Studio in Saginaw, Texas, which is near Fort Worth. Pianist Al Stricklin recalls a session there, and Hi Flyers musician Darrell Kirkpatrick specifically remembers that their April, 1940, session, with like prefixes, occurred there.

Dallas, Texas
February 24, 1941

Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Tommy Duncan, vocal; Don Harlan, clarinet; Wayne Johnson, saxophone & clarinet; Son Lansford, bass; Tubby Lewis, trumpet; Jamie MacIntosh, trumpet; Leon McAuliffe, steel guitar; Robert "Zeb" McNally, saxophone; Eldon Shamblin, electric guitar; Al Stricklin, piano; Louis Tierney, fiddle; Gene Tomlin, drums.

DAL 1168	LIEBESTRAUM	Instrumental	Unissued		
DAL 1169-1	LYLA LOU (Sims - Ferris)	L. McAuliffe	Ok 06327, Cq 9819		
DAL 1170-1	NEW WORRIED MIND (Davis - Daffan)	T. Duncan	Ok 06101, Cq 9818, Co 37019 & 20045, CanCo 331		
DAL 1171	LA PALOMA	Instrumental	Unissued		
DAL 1172-1	MAIDEN'S PRAYER (Wills)	T. Duncan	Ok 06205, Cq 9824		
DAL 1173-1	OH! YOU PRETTY WOMAN (Parker)	L. McAuliffe	Ok 06640, Cq 9821, Co 37022 & 20048		
DAL 1174-1	I FOUND A DREAM (W. Johnson)	T. Duncan			Co KG32416
DAL 1175	THE GIRL I LEFT BEHIND ME	Instrumental	Unissued		
DAL 1176-1	I KNEW THE MOMENT I LOST YOU (Wills - Duncan)	T. Duncan	Ok 06640, Co 37022 & 20048		Co KG32416, CoSP-CMM P212922
DAL 1177-1	DONE AND GONE (No CC)	Instrumental	Cq 9821		
DAL 1178-1	TWIN GUITAR SPECIAL (McAuliffe - Shamblin)	Instrumental	Ok 06327, Cq 9819		Co KG32416

Dallas, Texas
February 25, 1941

DAL 1179-1	MISSISSIPPI DELTA BLUES (J. Neville - J. Rodgers)	T. Duncan			Co KG32416
DAL 1180-1	TAKE ME BACK TO TULSA (Wills)	T. Duncan	Ok 06101, Cq 9818, Co 37307, 37019, 20045 & 20110, CanCo 331 & 6367		Co KG32416, CoSP-CMM P212922
DAL 1180-?	TAKE ME BACK TO TULSA (Wills)	T. Duncan			Co HL9003 (10"), Ha HL7036, Ha HS11358, Ep BG-33782
DAL 1181-1	TAKIN' IT HOME (Shamblin - Tierney)	Instrumental	Ok 06205, Cq 9824		

Dallas, Texas
February 26, 1941

DAL 1182	I'M SORRY WE SAID GOODBYE	T. Duncan	Unissued		
DAL 1183-1	HONEY, WHAT YOU GONNA DO (L. McAuliffe - E. Shamblin)	T. Duncan			Co KG32416

Hollywood, California
July 24, 1941

Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Jesse Ashlock, fiddle; Tommy Duncan, vocal; Don Harlan, clarinet & saxophone; Wayne Johnson, clarinet & saxophone; Darrell Jones, bass; Leon McAuliffe, steel guitar; Robert "Zeb" McNally (possibly), saxophone; Eldon Shamblin, electric guitar; Al Stricklin, piano; Louis Tierney, fiddle & saxophone; Gene Tomlin, drums.

H 372-2	BLUE BONNET LANE (Walker)	T. Duncan	Cq 9822		
H 373-1	BOB WILLS STOMP (Wills)	Instrumental	Ok 06371, Cq 9820, Co 37664 & 20263		
H 374-1	LIL LIZA JANE (de Lachau)	T. Duncan	Ok 06371, Cq 9820, Co 37664 & 20263		

MASTER NO.	TITLE & COMPOSER CREDIT	LEAD VOCAL	78 RPM	45 RPM	33 1/3 RPM
H 375-1	PLEASE DON'T LEAVE ME (Ashlock)	T. Duncan	Ok 6681, Co 36593, 37025 & 20051		
H 376	DON'T COUNT YOUR CHICKENS		Unissued		
H 377-1	CHEROKEE MAIDEN (Walker)	T. Duncan	Ok 06568, Cq 9822, Co 37422 & 20149		
H 378-1	RIDE ON! (MY PRAIRIE PINTO) (Blackmore - Cortez)	T. Duncan	Ok 06568, Co 37422 & 20149		
H 379-1	GOT A LETTER FROM MY KID TODAY (Zaret - Whitney - Kramer)	T. Duncan	Cq 9823		
H 380-1	IT'S ALL YOUR FAULT (Walker)	L. McAuliffe	Ok 06598, Co 37420 & 20147		
H 381-1	GOODNIGHT LITTLE SWEETHEART (Justice)	B. Wills	Ok 06530, Cq 9823, Co 37428 & 20155, CanCo 550		
H 382-1	DUSTY SKIES (Walker)	T. Duncan	Ok 06598, Co 37420 & 20147		
H 383-1	MY LIFE'S BEEN A PLEASURE (Ashlock)	L. McAuliffe	Ok 6681, Co 36593, 37025 & 20051		
Hollywood, California July 14, 1942	Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Danny Alguire, trumpet; George Balay, clarinet & saxophone; Morris Billington, piano; Alex Brashear, trumpet; Neil Duer, trombone; Bob Fitzgerald, drums; Don Harlan, clarinet; Joe Holley, fiddle; Leon Huff, guitar; Darrell Jones, bass; Leon McAuliffe, steel guitar; Doyle Salathiel, electric guitar; Benny Strickler, trumpet; Louis Tierney, fiddle & saxophone; Woodie Wood, clarinet & alto saxophone.				
H 834-1	WE MIGHT AS WELL FORGET IT (Bond)	L. Huff	Ok 6722, Co 37034 & 20059		
H 835	DROP US OFF AT BOB'S PLACE	L. Huff	Unissued		
H 836-1	HOME IN SAN ANTONE (F. Jenkins)	D. Alguire	Ok 6710, V Disc 340		Ha HL7304
H 837-1	THAT HOT LICK FIDDLIN' MAN (Wills - Walker)	L. McAuliffe	Co 20531		
H 838-1	LIBERTY (Wills)	Instrumental	Co 37926 & 20373, CanCo 958		
H 839-1	MISS MOLLY (C. Walker)	L. McAuliffe	Ok 6710, Co 37309 & 20112, V Disc 340, CanCo 6369		Co HL9003 (10"), Ha HL7036, Ha HS11358, AFRS W-260 (16"), Ep BG33782
H 840	IT NEVER CAN BE	L. Huff	Unissued		
Hollywood, California July 15, 1942					
H 841-1	HONEYMOON TRAIL (C. Walker)	Trio	Co 20487, CanCo 1175		
H 842	IT SEEMS LIKE YESTERDAY	L. Huff	Unissued		
H 843-1	YOU'RE FROM TEXAS (Walker)	L. McAuliffe	Ok 6722, Co 37034 & 20059		
H 844-1	GOODBYE, LIZA JANE (Duncan)	L. McAuliffe	Co 20555		Co 2-158 (7"), Ha HL7304
H 845-1	MY CONFESSION (Wills)	B. Wills	Ok 6703, Co 37030 & 20055		
H 845-?	MY CONFESSION (Wills)	B. Wills			Ha HL7304, CoSP-CMM P212922
H 846-1	TEN YEARS (J. Bond)	L. Huff	Ok 6692, Co 37405 & 20132		
Hollywood, California July 16, 1942	Personnel note: Bob Lee, vocalist, participates in today's session.				
H 847	THIS LITTLE ROSARY	B. Lee	Unissued		
H 848	WHEN IT'S HONEY SUCKLE TIME IN THE VALLEY	L. Huff	Unissued		
H 849-1	LET'S RIDE WITH BOB (Wills)	Instrumental	Ok 6692, Co 37405 & 20132		Ha HL7304, CoSP-CMM P212922
H 850	MY LADDIE	L. Huff	Unissued		
H 851-1	WHOSE HEART ARE YOU BREAKING NOW? (F. Jenkins)	L. Huff	Ok 6703, Co 37030 & 20055		Ha HL7304

NOTE: Between October, 1943, and January, 1945, Bob Wills's band was featured on a number of Armed Forces Radio Service transcriptions. Songs used on these 16" discs were recorded from radio broadcasts as well as

MASTER NO.	TITLE & COMPOSER CREDIT	LEAD VOCAL	78 RPM	45 RPM	33 1/3 RPM

recording studio sessions. Some Columbia recordings were also used; these are noted in the previous section. Interestingly, another song from this period, "Have I Stayed Away Too Long," appeared on a label called THE ANTONES. However, the origin for Wills's recording of this song is not known. THE ANTONES and AFRS recording data are found immediately after the Brunswick/A.R.C./Columbia section of the discography.

During 1945-47, Wills's band recorded over 200 songs for Tiffany Music Company's transcriptions on the BOB WILLS label. Full details are not available for these recordings, but it is believed they were all done in San Francisco. All relevant data known at this writing can be found immediately following the sections on The Antones and AFRS.

Hollywood, California
January 24, 1945

Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Ted Adams, bass; Noel Boggs, steel guitar; Alex Brashear, trumpet; Tommy Duncan, vocal; Cameron Hill, electric guitar; Joe Holley, fiddle; Millard Kelso, piano; Monte Mountjoy, drums; Jimmy Wyble, electric guitar.

H 1241-1	HANG YOUR HEAD IN SHAME (E. G. Nelson - S. Nelson - Rose)	T. Duncan		Ha HL7304
H 1242-1	SMOKE ON THE WATER	T. Duncan	Unissued	
H 1243-1	TEXAS PLAYBOY RAG (Wills)	Instrumental		Ha HL7304, CoSP-CMM P212922
H 1244-1	BLUER THAN BLUE	T. Duncan	Unissued	

NOTE: Since LP issues do not reveal matrix data, the discographer is guessing that the H 1241-1 and H 1243-1 recordings of "Hang Your Head in Shame" and "Texas Playboy Rag," respectively, were the ones used on the Ha HL7304 album release. These recordings are different from the original 78 rpm issues. Martine McCarthy, archivist at CBS Records, could not locate pertinent data in CBS files to confirm or dispute these assumptions.

Hollywood, California
January 26, 1945

H 1241-2	HANG YOUR HEAD IN SHAME (E. Nelson - S. Nelson - Fred Rose)	T. Duncan	Ok 6736	AFRS W-40 (16")
H 1242-2	SMOKE ON THE WATER (Nunn - Clements)	T. Duncan	Ok 6736	
H 1243-2a	TEXAS PLAYBOY RAG (Wills)	Instrumental	Co 36841 & 20002, CanCo 762	AFRS W-61 (16")
H 1244-2	BLUER THAN BLUE	T. Duncan	Unissued	
H 1245-1	ROLY POLY (Fred Rose)	T. Duncan	Co 36966, 37309, 20019 & 20112, CanCo 6369 & 801	Co HL9003 (10"), Ha HL7036, Ha HS11358, Co KG32416, AFRS W-260 (16"), Ep BG33782, CoSP-CMM P212922
H 1246-1	YOU DON'T CARE WHAT HAPPENS TO ME (Fred Rose)	T. Duncan	Ok 6742	
H 1247-1	STAY A LITTLE LONGER (Wills - Duncan)	T. Duncan	Co 37097 & 20078	Ha HL7304, CoSP-CMM P212922

Hollywood, California
January 28, 1945

H 1250-1	YOU SHOULD HAVE THOUGHT OF THAT BEFORE (Browne)	T. Duncan	Co 37824 & 20359, CanCo 952	
H 1251-1	I CAN'T GO ON THIS WAY (Fred Rose)	T. Duncan	Co 37097, 37307, 20078 & 20110, CanCo 6367	Co HL9003 (10"), Ha HL7036, Ha HS11358, Ep BG33782
H 1252	I'M THRU WASTIN' TIME ON YOU	T. Duncan	Unissued	
H 1253	EASY ROCKIN' CHAIR	T. Duncan	Unissued	
H 1254	JUST A PLAIN OLD COUNTRY BOY	T. Duncan	Unissued	

Hollywood, California
April 20, 1945

Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Ted Adams, bass; Noel Boggs, steel guitar; Alex Brashear, trumpet; Tommy Duncan, vocal; Cameron Hill, electric guitar; Joe Holley, fiddle; Millard Kelso, piano; Monte Mountjoy, drums; Louis Tierney, fiddle; Jimmy Wyble, electric guitar.

H 1366-1a	STARS AND STRIPES ON IWO JIMA (Wills - C. Johnson)	T. Duncan	Ok 6742	
H 1367-1a	SILVER DEW ON THE BLUE GRASS TONIGHT (Burt)	T. Duncan	Co 36841 & 20002, CanCo 762	AFRS W-61 (16")
H 1368	I'M SO GLAD I MET YOU	J. Holley	Unissued	
H 1369-1a	NEW SPANISH TWO STEP (Wills - Duncan)	T. Duncan	Co 36966 & 20019, CanCo 801	Ha HL7304

MASTER NO.	TITLE & COMPOSER CREDIT	LEAD VOCAL	78 RPM	45 RPM	33 1/3 RPM
Hollywood, California October 3, 1945	Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Les Anderson, steel guitar; Lester Barnard, Jr., electric guitar; Alex Brashear, trumpet; Tommy Duncan, vocal; Johnny Edwards, drums; Joe Holley, fiddle; Harley Huggins, guitar; Millard Kelso, piano; Bill Mounce, banjo; Louis Tierney, fiddle; Billy Jack Wills, bass.				
H 1551-1	EMPTY CHAIR AT THE CHRISTMAS TABLE (Wills - Johnsen - Sundin)	T. Duncan	Co 36881 & 20008		
H 1552-1	I'M FEELIN' BAD (Wills - Huggins)	H. Huggins	Co 20555		Co 2-158 (7"), Ha HL7345
H 1553-1	WHITE CROSS ON OKINAWA (Wills - Johnsen - Sundin)	T. Duncan	Co 36881 & 20008		
H 1554-1	THIS IS SOUTHLAND (Wills - Anderson)	Instrumental	Co 38137 & 20412, CanCo 1051		
Hollywood, California September 4, 1946	Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Jesse Ashlock, fiddle; Lester Barnard, Jr., electric guitar; Johnny Cuviello, drums; Tommy Duncan, vocal; Joe Holley, fiddle; Millard Kelso, piano; Dean & Evelyn McKinney, vocals; Tiny Moore, electric mandolin; Herb Remington, steel guitar; Jimmy Widener, banjo; Billy Jack Wills, bass.				
HCO 2004-1	COTTON EYED JOE (Wills - Duncan)	T. Duncan	Co 37212 & 20094		
HCO 2005-1	STACCATO WALTZ (Allender)	Trio	Co 37212 & 20094		
HCO 2005-2	STACCATO WALTZ (Allender)	Trio			Ha HL7345
HCO 2006-1	PUNKIN' STOMP (Wills)	Instrumental	Co 37564 & 20188		SGCA3
Hollywood, California September 5, 1946					
HCO 2007-1	SUGAR MOON (Wills - Walker)	T. Duncan	Co 37313 & 20113, CanCo 877		
HCO 2008-1	ROSE OF OLD PAWNEE (Fred Rose)	D. & E. McKinney	Co 37357 & 20122, CanCo 888		Ha HL7304
HCO 2009-1	HOW CAN IT BE WRONG (Wills - C. Walker)	J. Widener	Co 37564 & 20188		
HCO 2010-1	BRAIN CLOUDY BLUES (Wills - Duncan)	T. Duncan	Co 37313 & 20113, CanCo 877		Co KG32416, EngCBS 52976
HCO 2011-1	BOB WILLS BOOGIE (Wills - Kelso - Barnard)	Instrumental	Co 37357 & 20122, CanCo 888		Ha HL7345
Hollywood, California September 6, 1946					
HCO 2012-1	THERE'S A BIG ROCK IN THE ROAD (Fred Rose)	T. Duncan	Co 37205 & 20093, CanCo 855		
HCO 2013	I GOT A CINDER IN MY EYE	T. Duncan	Unissued		
HCO 2014	GO TO SLEEP OUR BABY	D. & E. McKinney	Unissued		
HCO 2015	VIRGINIA	T. Duncan	Unissued		
HCO 2016-1	I'M GONNA BE BOSS FROM NOW ON (Wills - Ashlock)	J. Ashlock	Co 37205 & 20093, CanCo 855		
HCO 2017-1	FAT BOY RAG (Wills - Barnard)	Instrumental	Co 37824 & 20359 CanCo 952		Ha HL7345
HCO 2018-1a	THE KIND OF LOVE I CAN'T FORGET (Wills - Ashlock)	T. Duncan	Co 37926 & 20373, CanCo 958		
HCO 2019	THERE'S TWO SIDES TO EVERY STORY	T. Duncan	Unissued		
Chicago, Illinois October 15, 1947	Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Johnny Cuviello, drums; Tommy Duncan, vocal; Joe Holley, fiddle; Millard Kelso, piano; Tiny Moore, electric mandolin & fiddle; Herb Remington, steel guitar; Eldon Shamblin, electric guitar; Ocie Stockard, banjo; Billy Jack Wills, bass.				
CCO 4858-1	THE DEVIL AIN'T LAZY (Fred Rose)	T. Duncan	Co 20458		
CCO 4859-1	A SWEET KIND OF LOVE (Fred Rose)	T. Duncan	Co 37988 & 20391, CanCo 993		Ha HL7345
CCO 4860-1	HOMETOWN STOMP (Wills - Remington)	Instrumental	Co 20487, CanCo 1175		SGCA3
	NOTE: "Hometown Stomp" was originally titled "U.S.A. Stomp," but this title was changed prior to release.				

MASTER NO.	TITLE & COMPOSER CREDIT	LEAD VOCAL	78 RPM	45 RPM	33 1/3 RPM
CCO 4861-1	COWBOY STOMP (Wills - Moore)	Instrumental	Co 37988 & 20391, CanCo 993		
CCO 4862-1	MISERY (Wills - Duncan - Moore)	T. Duncan	Co 20582		Ha HL7345
CCO 4863-1	DOWN IN MY NECK OF THE WOODS	T. Duncan	Unissued		
CCO 4864-1	BOB WILLS SCHOTTISCHE (Wills - Moore)	Calls by T. Duncan	Co 20458		Ha HL7345
CCO 4865	I JUST DON'T WANT THAT KIND OF LOVE	T. Duncan	Unissued		

Chicago, Illinois
October 16, 1947

Personnel note: Dean and Evelyn McKinney, vocalists, participate in today's session.

CCO 4866-1	TEXARKANA BABY (Fred Rose - Clark)	T. Duncan	Co 38179 & 20424, CanCo 1080		
CCO 4867-1	GOOD TIME CAKE-WALK (Fred Rose)	T. Duncan	Co 20531		
CCO 4868-1	CAN'T GET ENOUGH OF TEXAS (Wills - Dilbeck)	T. Duncan	Co 20513		
CCO 4869-1	YOU'RE THERE (Fred Rose)	T. Duncan	Co 20582		Ha HL7345
CCO 4870-1	THANKS FOR THE HEARTACHE (THANKS FOR THE TEARS)	D. & E. McKinney	Unissued		
CCO 4871-1	NEW TEXAS PLAYBOY RAG (Wills - Walker)	T. Duncan	Co 38179 & 20424, CanCo 1080		Ha HL7345
CCO 4872-1	WHAT'S THE USE TO TAKE YOU BACK AGAIN	T. Duncan	Unissued		
CCO 4873-1	DEEP WATER (Fred Rose)	T. Duncan	Co 38137 & 20412, CanCo 1051		

THE ANTONES

Los Angeles, California
Probably spring, 1944

Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Les Anderson, steel guitar; Jesse Ashlock, fiddle; Tommy Duncan, vocal; Cameron Hill, electric guitar; Monte Mountjoy, drums; Rip Ramsey, bass; Louis Tierney, fiddle; Jimmy Wyble, electric guitar. Another fiddler may also be present.

(LHB 100-A)	HAVE I STAYED AWAY TOO LONG (No CC)	T. Duncan	An 100 & 501

NOTE: THE ANTONES was a record label of the Bob Wills Fan Club and began with initial releases on 78 rpm discs. These records consisted of reissues of 1930s Brunswick/A.R.C. sides, plus the above song, which was possibly recorded from a radio broadcast. Later, two 10" LPs were released containing eight songs each. Thirteen of the songs were from the Brunswick/A.R.C. catalog, while "Sunbonnet Sue," "My Confession," and "Too Late" were from AFRS transcriptions. Consult the AFRS section immediately following for relevant data on these three songs.

TITLE	LEAD VOCAL	33 1/3 RPM TRANSCRIPTION	33 1/3 RPM LP

ARMED FORCES RADIO SERVICE TRANSCRIPTIONS

Los Angeles, California
October, 1943 -
June, 1944

Personnel (in the aggregate): Bob Wills, fiddle; Les Anderson, steel guitar; Jesse Ashlock, fiddle; Alex Brashear, trumpet; Howard Davis, drums; Tommy Duncan, vocal; Dick Hamilton, electric guitar; Cameron Hill, electric guitar; Millard Kelso, piano; Tiny Mott, saxophone; Monte Mountjoy, drums; Laura Lee Owens, vocal; Rip Ramsey, bass; Buddy Ray, fiddle; Louis Tierney, fiddle & saxophone; Jimmy Wyble, electric guitar.

DUSTY SKIES	T. Duncan	AFRS "Melody Roundup" #445
GOODBYE LIZA JANE	T. Duncan	AFRS W-26, AFRS "Melody Roundup" #431
I BETCHA MY HEART I LOVE YOU	L. Owens	AFRS W-19
IDA RED	T. Duncan	AFRS "Melody Roundup" #634, AFRS "Melody Roundup" #740, AFRS "Melody Roundup" #759
I'LL BE TRUE TO THE ONE I LOVE	L. Owens	AFRS W-32, AFRS "Melody Roundup" #445, AFRS "Melody Roundup" #634
A MAIDEN'S PRAYER	T. Duncan	AFRS "Melody Roundup" #759
MISS MOLLIE	T. Duncan	AFRS W-32
MY CONFESSION	B. Wills	AFRS "Melody Roundup" #697, AFRS "Melody Roundup" #759
PERDIDO	Instrumental	AFRS "Melody Roundup" #445
RIGHT OR WRONG	T. Duncan	AFRS "Melody Roundup" #697, AFRS "Melody Roundup" #759
SAN ANTONIO ROSE	T. Duncan	AFRS W-19, AFRS "Melody Roundup" #368
SILVER BELLS	Instrumental	AFRS "Melody Roundup" #445, AFRS "Melody Roundup" #740

TITLE	LEAD VOCAL	33 1/3 RPM TRANSCRIPTION	33 1/3 RPM LP
STEEL GUITAR RAG	Instrumental	AFRS "Melody Roundup" #634, AFRS "Melody Roundup" #697, AFRS "Melody Roundup" #759	
STUMBLING ALL AROUND	Instrumental	AFRS W-32, AFRS "Melody Roundup" #445, AFRS "Melody Roundup" #740	
TEXAS PLAINS	L. Owens	AFRS "Melody Roundup" #740	
THANKS FOR YOUR LETTER	L. Owens	AFRS W-32, AFRS "Melody Roundup" #697	

NOTE: AFRS transcriptions list no composer credits. Also, all "Melody Roundup" discs reference neither song titles nor artist credits. The "Melody Roundup" discs list only program number and program emcee. Programs 431, 445, and 740 are emceed by Lum 'n' Abner. Program 697 is hosted by Bill (Hopalong Cassidy) Boyd and William Frawley, while program 634 is by Boyd and Foy Willing. Emcee for program 759 is Lou Crosby, and emcees for program 368 are Preston Foster and Percy Kilbride.

Only a portion of the song "Right or Wrong" is heard on "Melody Roundup" #697.

Los Angeles, California
June, 1944 -
December, 1944

Personnel (in the aggregate): Bob Wills, fiddle; Ted Adams, bass, Jesse Ashlock, fiddle; Noel Boggs, steel guitar; Vic Davis, piano; Tommy Duncan, vocal; Cameron Hill, electric guitar; Joe Holley, fiddle; Millard Kelso, banjo; Chuck Mackey, trumpet; Tiny Mott, saxophone; Monte Mountjoy, drums; Laura Lee Owens, vocal; Louis Tierney, fiddle; Jimmy Wyble, electric guitar.

BOB WILLS SPECIAL	Instrumental	AFRS W-27, AFRS "Melody Roundup" #634	
I'M TALKING ABOUT YOU	T. Duncan	AFRS W-19	
MY CONFESSION	B. Wills	AFRS W-26	An LP6010
RIGHT OR WRONG	T. Duncan	AFRS W-27, AFRS "Melody Roundup" #431, AFRS "Melody Roundup" #740	
SUNBONNET SUE	B. Wills & T. Duncan (duet)	AFRS W-26, AFRS "Melody Roundup" #697	An LP6000
TAKE ME BACK TO TULSA	T. Duncan	AFRS W-27, AFRS "Melody Roundup" #431	
TOO LATE	L. Owens	AFRS W-26, AFRS "Melody Roundup" #431	An LP6010

NOTE: Around mid-1944, Bob Wills organized what may have been his biggest band for a tour of Northern California and the Pacific Northwest. Laura Lee McBride and Monte Mountjoy recall the personnel as follows: Bob Wills, Joe Holley, and Louis Tierney on fiddles; Les Anderson and Noel Boggs on steel guitars; Jimmy Wyble and Cameron Hill on lead guitars; Millard Kelso on piano; Rip Ramsey on bass; Hal Barnett, Chuck Mackey, and Sherman Mulee on trumpets; Harold Claunch and Dale Jolly on alto saxophones; Bunny Peterson on tenor saxophone; Tiny Mott on tenor and baritone saxophones; Clyde Hunter on trombone; Monte Mountjoy and Carlisle Schnitzer on drums; Tommy Duncan and Laura Lee Owens (McBride) on vocals. Fiddler Louis Tierney also doubled on alto saxophone. Unfortunately, no recordings by this 21-piece orchestra have surfaced.

MASTER NO.	TITLE	LEAD VOCAL	33 1/3 RPM TRANS. SIDE NO. & TRACK

TIFFANY MUSIC COMPANY TRANSCRIPTIONS

San Francisco, California
Mid-1945 through 1947

Personnel (in the aggregate): Bob Wills, fiddle; Lester Barnard, Jr., electric guitar; Noel Boggs, steel guitar; Alex Brashear, trumpet; Johnny Cuviello, drums; Tommy "Spike" Doss, vocal; Tommy Duncan, vocal; Joe Holley, fiddle; Roy Honeycutt, steel guitar; Millard Kelso, piano; Dean & Evelyn McKinney, vocals; Tiny Moore, electric mandolin; Herb Remington, steel guitar; Eldon Shamblin, electric guitar; Ocie Stockard, banjo; Louis Tierney, fiddle; Billy Jack Wills, bass; Luke Wills, vocal. Other possible participants include Johnny Edwards, drums; Monte Mountjoy, drums; Leonard Seago, fiddle; Jimmy Widener, banjo.

ACROSS THE ALLEY FROM THE ALAMO	T. Duncan	BW 48-A
ALOHA	D. & E. McKinney	BW 42-D
ALONG THE NAVAJO TRAIL	T. Duncan	BW 2-D
ARKANSAS TRAVELER	Instrumental	BW 38-A
AT THE END OF THE LANE	T. Doss	BW 27-D
BABY WON'T YOU PLEASE COME HOME	T. Duncan	BW 10-C
BACK HOME AGAIN IN INDIANA	T. Duncan	BW 8-B
BAREFOOT DAYS	L. Barnard	BW 22-B
BASIN STREET BLUES	T. Duncan	BW 33-C
BEAUMONT RAG	Instrumental	BW 47-D
BIG BEAVER	Instrumental	BW 26-C
BIG 'TATOES	Instrumental	BW 38-C
BLACK RIDER	T. Duncan	BW 19-B

MASTER NO.	TITLE	LEAD VOCAL	33 1/3 RPM TRANS. SIDE NO. & TRACK
	BLUE BONNET LANE	T. Duncan	BW 1-B
	BRING IT ON DOWN TO MY HOUSE HONEY	T. Duncan & B. Wills	BW 14-C
	BROWN SKIN GAL	Instrumental	BW 22-D
	BUBBLES IN MY BEER		BW 50-D*
	'C' JAM	Instrumental	BW 28-C
	CAROLINA IN THE MORNING	Instrumental	BW 10-A
	CATTLE CALL	D. & E. McKinney	BW 35-D
	CHEROKEE MAIDEN	T. Duncan	BW 14-A
	CHICKEN REEL	Instrumental	BW 4-D
	CHINA TOWN	J. Holley	BW 11-E
	CHURCH ACROSS THE WAY**		
	CIMARRON ROLL ON	Trio	BW 19-D
	COLUMBUS STOCKADE BLUES	Group	BW 23-A
	CONVICT AND THE ROSE	T. Duncan	BW 20-B
	COOL WATER	T. Duncan	BW 28-D
	CORINNE CORINNA		BW 51-D*
	COTTON EYED JOE	T. Duncan	BW 25-B
	COVERED WAGON	T. Duncan	BW 23-C
	COWBOY'S DREAM	T. Duncan	BW 18-D
	CRAZY RHYTHM		BW 51-B*
	CROSS MY HEART I LOVE YOU		BW 52-A*
	DEAR OLD SOUTHERN HOME	T. Duncan	BW 18-A
	DETOUR	T. Duncan	BW 45-B
	DEV'LISH MARY	T. Duncan	BW 46-C
	DO YOU EVER THINK OF ME?	D. & E. McKinney	BW 20-A
	DONE AND GONE	Instrumental	BW 12-D
	DON'T CRY BABY	T. Duncan	BW 33-D
	DON'T LOVE NOBODY	Instrumental	BW 7-A
	DON'T YOU TETCH IT		BW 51-A*
	DREAMS OF AN OLD LOVE AFFAIR	D. & E. McKinney	BW 10-B
	DURANG'S HORN PIPE	Instrumental	BW 38-B
	DUSTY SKIES	T. Duncan	BW 27-C
	ECHOES FROM THE HILLS	D. & E. McKinney	BW 4-C
	EL RANCHO GRANDE	T. Duncan	BW 3-A
	ELMER'S TUNE	Instrumental	BW 46-B
	EMPTY CHAIR AT THE CHRISTMAS TABLE	T. Duncan	BW 34-B
	EVERYBODY DOES IT IN HAWAII	T. Duncan	BW 36-B
	FADED LOVE	Instrumental	BW 22-C
	FAT BOY RAG	Instrumental	BW 39-D
	FIVE MINUTES MORE	T. Duncan, D. & E. McKinney (trio)	BW 45-A
	FOLEY WALTZ	Instrumental	BW 5-E
	FOR SENTIMENTAL REASONS		BW 49-B*
	FORGIVE ME**	L. Wills	
	G I WISH	T. Duncan	BW 41-D
	GAY RANCHERO	L. Wills	BW 30-D
	GIVE MY LOVE TO NELL	D. & E. McKinney	BW 6-C
	A GOOD MAN IS HARD TO FIND	T. Duncan	BW 29-D
	GOODNIGHT LITTLE SWEETHEART	B. Wills	BW 19-C
	GOODNIGHT WALTZ	Instrumental	BW 26-A
	GOT A LETTER FROM MY KID	T. Duncan	BW 3-D
	HAVE I TOLD YOU LATELY	Trio	BW 46-D
	HAWAIIAN WAR CHANT	D. & E. McKinney	BW 35-C
	HEARTACHES	D. McKinney	BW 45-D
	HOME IN SAN ANTONE	T. Duncan	BW 14-D
	HONEYSUCKLE ROSE	Instrumental	BW 47-A
	HOPPIN' LUCY	Instrumental	BW 14-B

MASTER NO.	TITLE	LEAD VOCAL	33 1/3 RPM TRANS. SIDE NO. & TRACK
	HOT LICK FIDDLIN' MAN**		
	I CAN'T BEGIN TO TELL YOU	T. Duncan	BW 35-B
	I CAN'T GO ON THIS WAY	T. Duncan	BW 25-A
	I DON'T KNOW WHY	J. Holley, D. & E. McKinney (trio)	BW 20-D
	I HAD SOMEONE ELSE	T. Duncan	BW 21-D
	I HEAR YOU TALKING	Instrumental	BW 33-A
	I KNEW THE MOMENT I LOST YOU	T. Duncan	BW 9-B
	I WANT TO BE NEAR YOU		BW 52-B*
	I WONDER IF YOU FEEL THE WAY I DO	T. Duncan	BW 23-B
	IDA RED	T. Duncan	BW 15-A
	IF IT'S WRONG TO LOVE YOU	T. Duncan	BW 5-A
	I'LL GET MINE BYE AND BYE	T. Duncan	BW 35-A
	I'LL STRING ALONG WITH YOU	T. Duncan	BW 11-D
	I'M A DING DONG DADDY	T. Duncan & B. Wills	BW 30-C
	I'M FREE FROM THE CHAIN GANG NOW	T. Duncan	BW 31-A
	I'M GONNA BE BOSS	T. Duncan	BW 25-D
	I'M RIDIN' FOR THE RANCHO TONIGHT	Trio	BW 9-A
	I'M WAITING FOR SHIPS THAT NEVER COME IN	T. Duncan	BW 41-A
	IN THE MOOD	Instrumental	BW 49-D*
	IT MAKES NO DIFFERENCE NOW	T. Duncan	BW 7-D
	IT'S ALL OVER NOW**		
	IT'S MY LAZY DAY	T. Duncan	BW 28-B
	IT'S YOUR RED WAGON	T. Duncan	BW 7-B
	JESSE	Instrumental	BW 20-C
	JUST FRIENDS	Instrumental	BW 24-C
	KEEP KNOCKIN' BUT YOU CAN'T COME IN	T. Duncan	BW 12-A
	LA CUCARACHA	Instrumental	BW 44-C
	LA GOLONDRINA	Instrumental	BW 43-B
	LAST LETTER	L. Wills	BW 21-B
	LET ME CALL YOU SWEETHEART	T. Duncan & D. McKinney (duet)	BW 40-D
	LIBERTY	Instrumental	BW 19-A
	LIEBESTRAUM	Instrumental	BW 39-A
	LINDA	T. Doss	BW 48-D
	LITTLE BETTY BROWN	Instrumental	BW 40-A
	LITTLE JOE THE WRANGLER	T. Duncan	BW 6-D
	LITTLE 'LIZA JANE	T. Duncan	BW 4-B
	LITTLE STAR OF HEAVEN	L. Wills	BW 24-A
	LONESOME HEARTED BLUES		BW 50-C*
	LOVE LETTERS IN THE SAND	T. Duncan	BW 8-C
	MAIDEN'S PRAYER	T. Duncan	BW 24-B
	MAKE ROOM IN YOUR HEART FOR A FRIEND**		
	MAMA INEZ	Instrumental	BW 43-D
	MANY TEARS AGO	Trio	BW 48-C
	MARGIE	T. Duncan	BW 29-C
(SSR602RE)	MILK COW BLUES (Cocomo Arnold)(from 78 rpm disc)	T. Duncan	(Pressed on 78 rpm only; BW SSR602RE/SSR603RE)
	MISS MOLLY	T. Duncan	BW 16-D
	MISSISSIPPI DELTA BLUES		BW 51-C*
	MOONLIGHT ON THE GANGES**	Instrumental	
	MOONLIGHT ON THE PRAIRIE	Trio	BW 26-D
	MY CONFESSION	H. Wills	BW 6-B
	MY GAL SAL	T. Duncan & B. Wills (duet)	BW 13-B
	MY LIFE'S BEEN A PLEASURE	T. Duncan	BW 18-C
	MY WINDOW FACES THE SOUTH	T. Duncan	BW 34-D
	NEVER NO MORE HARD TIMES BLUES	T. Duncan	BW 8-A

MASTER NO.	TITLE	LEAD VOCAL	33 1/3 RPM TRANS. SIDE NO. & TRACK
	NEW SPANISH TWO STEP	T. Duncan	BW 26-B
	NO LETTER TODAY	T. Duncan	BW 36-C
	NO ONE TO CRY TO	Trio	BW 28-A
	NO WONDER	B. Wills	BW 8-E
	NOBODY'S DARLIN'	T. Duncan	BW 39-B
	NOBODY'S SWEETHEART NOW	T. Duncan	BW 16-C
	OH MONAH	T. Duncan	BW 32-B
	OH WHAT IT SEEMED TO BE	T. Duncan	BW 21-C
	OKIE BOOGIE		BW 49-A*
	OKLAHOMA HILLS	T. Duncan	BW 7-E
	OKLAHOMA RAG	Instrumental	BW 15-E
	OLE BUTTERMILK SKY		BW 49-C*
	ON THE ALAMO	Instrumental	BW 29-A
	OVER THE WAVES	Instrumental	BW 9-D
	PAL OF MY LONELY HOUR	D. & E. McKinney	BW 10-D
	PARADISE ISLE	Instrumental	BW 22-A
	PATTY ON THE TURN PIKE	Instrumental	BW 38-D
	PLAY FIDDLE PLAY**		
	PLEASE DON'T LEAVE ME	T. Duncan	BW 6-A
	PUNKIN' STOMP	Instrumental	BW 47-C
	PUT ANOTHER CHAIR AT THE TABLE**		
	PUT YOUR ARMS AROUND ME HONEY	D. & E. McKinney	BW 42-A
	RAINBOW AT MIDNIGHT		BW 50-A*
	RED RIVER VALLEY	T. Duncan	BW 15-C
	RIDE ON MY PRAIRIE PINTO	T. Duncan	BW 17-A
	RIDING ON A HUMP BACKED MULE	T. Duncan	BW 41-C
	RIGHT OR WRONG**		
	RIVER STAY 'WAY FROM MY DOOR	T. Duncan	BW 32-A
	ROLY POLY	T. Duncan	BW 29-B
	ROSELAND MELODY	Instrumental	BW 12-E
	RUBBER DOLLY	Instrumental	BW 15-D
	ST. LOUIS BLUES**		
	ST. LOUIS BLUES #2**		
	SALLY GOODEN	Instrumental	BW 5-D
	SAN ANTONIO ROSE	T. Duncan	BW 1-C
	SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY	T. Duncan	BW 7-C
	SHE'S KILLIN' ME	T. Duncan	BW 4-E
	SILVER AND GOLD**		
	SILVER BELLS	Instrumental	BW 5-C
	SILVER DEW ON THE BLUE GRASS TONIGHT	T. Duncan	BW 36-A
	SILVER ON THE SAGE	T. Duncan	BW 4-A
	SIOUX CITY SUE	T. Duncan	Unissued
	SIOUX CITY SUE	T. Duncan	BW 30-B
	SITTIN' ON TOP OF THE WORLD	B. Wills	BW 13-C
	SLEEPY RIO GRANDE	J. Holley, D. & E. McKinney (trio)	BW 2-C
	SMILE DARN YOU SMILE	T. Duncan	BW 15-B
	SMITH'S REEL	Instrumental	BW 21-A
	SNOW DEER	T. Duncan	BW 11-C
	SOLDIER'S JOY	Instrumental	BW 13-E
	SOUTH		BW 52-C*
	SPANISH TWO STEP	T. Duncan	BW 1-D
	STARS AND STRIPES ON IWO JIMA	T. Duncan	BW 32-D
	STEEL GUITAR RAG	Instrumental	BW 3-B
	STONEY POINT	Instrumental	BW 13-A
	STRAIGHTEN UP AND FLY RIGHT	D. McKinney	BW 27-A
	SUN BONNET SUE	T. Duncan	BW 32-C
	SWEET GEORGIA BROWN	T. Duncan	BW 13-D
(SSR603RE)	SWEET JENNIE LEE (Walter Donaldson)(from 78 rpm disc)	T. Duncan	BW 8-D (also pressed on 78 rpm; BW SSR602RE/SSR603RE)

MASTER NO.	TITLE	LEAD VOCAL	33 1/3 RPM TRANS. SIDE NO. & TRACK
	A SWEET KIND OF LOVE		BW 52-D*
	SWEETHEARTS OR STRANGERS	D. & E. McKinney	BW 39-C
	TAKE ME BACK TO MY BOOTS AND SADDLE	T. Duncan	BW 16-B
	TAKE ME BACK TO TULSA	T. Duncan	BW 31-B
	TEN YEARS	T. Duncan	BW 3-C
	TEN YEARS	T. Duncan	BW 36-D
	TEXAS PLAINS	D. & E. McKinney	BW 18-B
	TEXAS PLAYBOY RAG	Instrumental	BW 34-A
	TEXAS PLAYBOY THEME (beginning)	T. Duncan	BW 1-A, 37-A, 37-B, 37-C
	TEXAS PLAYBOY THEME (ending)	T. Duncan	BW 37-D, 37-E, 37-F
	THAT'S HOW MUCH I LOVE YOU	T. Duncan	BW 45-C
	THERE I'VE SAID IT AGAIN	T. Duncan	BW 44-B
	THERE'S A BIG ROCK IN THE ROAD	T. Duncan	BW 25-C
	THERE'S A SILVER MOON ON THE GOLDEN GATE	D. & E. McKinney	BW 43-C
	THERE'S GONNA BE A PARTY	T. Duncan	BW 17-B
	THERE'S NO DISAPPOINTMENT IN HEAVEN	B. Wills	BW 43-A
	'TIL THE LONGEST DAY I LIVE	L. Wills	BW 40-C
	TIME CHANGES EVERYTHING	T. Duncan	BW 5-B
	TOO LATE	L. Wills	BW 30-A
	TOO MANY IRONS IN THE FIRE	T. Duncan	BW 44-D
	TRAVELIN' BLUES	T. Duncan	BW 17-D
	TUMBLING TUMBLE WEEDS	J. Holley, D. & E. McKinney (trio)	BW 9-C
	UNDER THE DOUBLE EAGLE	Instrumental	BW 33-B
	UP A LAZY RIVER	T. Duncan	BW 31-D
	WAGON WHEELS	T. Duncan	BW 46-A
	WALTZ OF THE HILLS		BW 50-B*
	WE MIGHT AS WELL FORGET IT	T. Duncan	BW 24-D
	WEDNESDAY NIGHT WALTZ	Instrumental	BW 42-C
	THE WEST IS IN MY SOUL	T. Doss	BW 27-B
	WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH THE MILL?	T. Duncan	BW 11-B
	WHEN DAY IS DONE	D. McKinney	BW 42-B
	WHEN MY BLUE MOON TURNS TO GOLD AGAIN	T. Duncan	BW 16-A
	WHEN MY DREAM BOAT COMES HOME	T. Duncan	BW 44-A
	WHITE CROSS ON OKINAWA	T. Duncan	BW 34-C
	WHO'S SORRY NOW	T. Duncan	BW 11-A
	WHOSE HEART ARE YOU BREAKING NOW	T. Duncan	BW 17-C
	WILL THERE BE ANY YODELING IN HEAVEN**		
	WOODCHOPPER'S BALL	Instrumental	BW 48-B
	WORRIED MIND	T. Duncan	BW 2-B
	YEARNING	B. Wills	BW 47-B
	YOU ARE MY SUNSHINE	T. Duncan	BW 40-B
	YOU CAN'T BREAK THE CHAINS OF LOVE	D. & E. McKinney	BW 31-C
	YOU DON'T CARE WHAT HAPPENS TO ME	T. Duncan	BW 41-B
	YOU MAY NOT BE AN ANGEL	(This title was used on some issues. See "I'll String Along With You.")	
	YOU WAITED TOO LONG	T. Duncan	BW 12-B
	YOU'RE FROM TEXAS	T. Duncan	BW 2-A
	YOU'RE TIRED OF ME	L. Wills	BW 12-C

*Although an advertising brochure assigns these release numbers to these songs, there is no evidence that these particular records were ever pressed. However, it is likely the band did record the songs for Tiffany.

**Dub recordings suggest that these songs were recorded for Tiffany. However, no release numbers were ever assigned. Also, it is likely that other recordings were made, but all efforts to secure the necessary information about the entire catalog of Tiffany recordings from the possessor of these data have been in vain.

NOTE: These 16" Tiffany transcriptions on the BOB WILLS label reference no composer credits. Nor are master numbers for the individual songs available.

MGM RECORDS

Radio Recorders
Hollywood, California
October 30, 1947

Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Johnny Cuviello, drums; Tommy Duncan, vocal; Joe Holley, fiddle; Millard Kelso, piano; Dean & Evelyn McKinney, vocals; Tiny Moore, electric mandolin & fiddle; Herb Remington, steel guitar; Eldon Shamblin, electric guitar; Ocie Stockard, banjo; Billy Jack Wills, bass.

MASTER NO.	TITLE & COMPOSER CREDIT	LEAD VOCAL	78 RPM	45 RPM	33 1/3 RPM
47-S-3202-2	SILVER LAKE BLUES (Bob Wills)	Instrumental	MGM 10415, MGM 30393	MGM K30393	MGM E-91 (10"), HH HHLP5006
47-S-3203-2	LITTLE COWBOY LULLABY (Wills - Walker)	T. Duncan	MGM 10139		
47-S-3204-2	CLOSED FOR REPAIRS (Wills - Brown)	T. Duncan	MGM 10139		
47-S-3205-1	DOG HOUSE BLUES (Wills - Irby)	T. Duncan	MGM 10370		
47-S-3206-2	BUBBLES IN MY BEER (Wills - Walker - Duncan)	T. Duncan	MGM 10116		
47-S-3207-2	'NEATH HAWAIIAN PALMS (Wills - Campbell)	D. & E. McKinney	MGM 10236		
47-S-3208-1	PAPA'S JUMPIN' (Wills - Shamblin)	Instrumental	MGM 10459, MGM 30391	MGM K30391	MGM E-91 (10")
47-S-3209-1	DON'T BE ASHAMED OF YOUR AGE (Wills - Walker)	T. Duncan	MGM 10415		
47-S-3210-2	BLACKOUT BLUES (Wills - Duncan)	T. Duncan	MGM 10292		
47-S-3211-1	SPANISH FANDANGO (Bob Wills and Smokey Rogers)	T. Duncan	MGM 10116, MGM 30394	MGM K30394, MGM K12985	MGM E-91 (10")

Radio Recorders
Hollywood, California
October 31, 1947

47-S-3212-3	I WANT TO BE NEAR YOU (Wills - Duncan)	Trio	MGM 10334		
47-S-3213-4	SALLY GOODIN' (Wills - Duncan)	T. Duncan	MGM 10292		HH HHLP5006
47-S-3214-1	SHE'S GONE (Wills - Duncan)	T. Duncan	MGM 10620		
47-S-3215-1	I HAD A LITTLE MULE (Wills - Duncan)	T. Duncan	MGM 10213		
47-S-3216-3	GO HOME WITH THE GIRLS IN THE MORNIN' (Wills - Duncan)	T. Duncan	MGM 10276		HH HHLP5006

Radio Recorders
Hollywood, California
November 10, 1947

47-S-3235-2	STILL WATER RUNS THE DEEPEST (Jesse Ashlock)	T. Duncan	MGM 10276		
47-S-3236-2	COTTON PATCH BLUES (Wills - Moore)	T. Duncan	MGM 10291		
47-S-3237-2	NOTHIN' BUT THE BEST FOR MY BABY (Burns)	T. Duncan	MGM 10731		HH HHLP5006
47-S-3238-2	BLUES FOR DIXIE (Mayo)	T. Duncan	MGM 10213		

Radio Recorders
Hollywood, California
November 12, 1947

47-S-3248-1	CROSS MY HEART I LOVE YOU (Burns)	T. Duncan	MGM 10980	MGM K10980	
47-S-3249-3	KEEPER OF MY HEART (Wills - Irby)	T. Duncan	MGM 10175		HH HHLP5006
47-S-3250-1	I'LL HAVE SOMEBODY ELSE (Wills)	T. Duncan	MGM 10175		HH HHLP5006
47-S-3251-3	THORN IN MY HEART (Wills - Martin)	T. Duncan	MGM 10236		
47-S-3252-4	PLAYBOY CHIMES (Wills - Remington)	Instrumental	MGM 10370, MGM 30392	MGM K30392	MGM E-91 (10"), HH HHLP5006
47-S-3253-2	HOP, SKIP AND JUMP OVER TEXAS (Wills - Kelso)	Instrumental	MGM 10291, MGM 30391	MGM K30391	MGM E-91 (10")
47-S-3254-1	TEXAS DRUMMER BOY (Wills - Cuviello)	Instrumental	MGM 10334, MGM 30392	MGM K30392	MGM E-91 (10")

MASTER NO.	TITLE & COMPOSER CREDIT	LEAD VOCAL	78 RPM	45 RPM	33 1/3 RPM
Radio Recorders Hollywood, California May 5, 1949	Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Alex Brashear, trumpet; Johnny Gimble, fiddle & electric mandolin; Doc Lewis, piano; Jack Loyd, vocal; Tiny Moore, electric mandolin & fiddle; Herb Remington, steel guitar; Eldon Shamblin, electric guitar; Billy Jack Wills, drums; Luke Wills, bass. Jack Loyd also plays bass on a few sides.				
49-S-3107-4	I MARRIED THE ROSE OF SAN ANTONE (Loyd - Wills)	J. Loyd	MGM 10526		
49-S-3108-2	IDA RED LIKES THE BOOGIE (Moore - Wills)	T. Moore	MGM 10570		
49-S-3109-3	THE WARM RED WINE (Walker)	J. Loyd	MGM 10491		
49-S-3110	No data available				
49-S-3111-4	I AIN'T GOT NOBODY (Williams - Graham)	J. Loyd	MGM 10459, MGM 30394	MGM K30394	MGM E-91 (10"), MGM SE-4866, MGM GAS-141
49-S-3112-2	BOOT HEEL DRAG (Remington - Wills)	Instrumental	MGM 10786, MGM 30393	MGM K10786, MGM K30393	MGM E-91 (10"), MGM SE-4866, MGM GAS-141, SGCA3
49-S-3113-3	NOTHING BUT TROUBLE (Luper _ Wills)	J. Loyd	MGM 10491		
49-S-3114	No data available				
49-S-3115-2	BOB WILLS' SQUARE DANCE NO. I (Wills)	Instrumental	MGM 10469		
49-S-3116-1	BOB WILLS' SQUARE DANCE NO. II (Wills)	Instrumental	MGM 12142	MGM K12142	
Radio Recorders Hollywood, California May 6, 1949					
49-S-3117-2	A KING WITHOUT A QUEEN (Moore - Wills - Wills)	J. Loyd	MGM 10570		
49-S-3118	No data available				
49-S-3119-1	BOB WILLS' SQUARE DANCE NO. III (Wills)	Instrumental	MGM 10469		
49-S-3120-2	BOB WILLS' SQUARE DANCE NO. IV (Wills)	Instrumental	MGM 12142	MGM K12142	
Radio Recorders Hollywood, California May 7, 1949					
49-S-3121-2	WHEN IT'S CHRISTMAS ON THE RANGE (Denney - Ward)	J. Loyd	MGM 10512		
49-S-3122-3	SANTA'S ON HIS WAY (Nelson - King)	J. Loyd	MGM 10512		
49-S-3123-2	MEAN WOMAN WITH GREEN EYES (Wooley)	J. Loyd	MGM 10620		MGM SE-4866, MGM GAS-141
49-S-3124-3	MY LITTLE ROCK CANDY BABY (Harbour - Wills)	J. Loyd	MGM 10526		MGM SE-4866, MGM GAS-141
?	ANYTHING (Luper - Wills)	J. Loyd	MGM 10898	MGM K10898	
	NOTE: No master number is available for the above song, "Anything," but it was recorded on one of the May, 1949, sessions. The master number would most likely be one of the following: 49-S-3110, 49-S-3114, or 49-S-3118.				
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma January 23, 1950	Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Hal Clampitt, steel guitar; Keith Coleman, fiddle; Johnny Gimble, fiddle & electric mandolin; Tiny Moore, electric mandolin; Eldon Shamblin, electric guitar; Mancel Tierney, piano; Bob White, fiddle; Jimmie Widener, tenor banjo; Billy Jack Wills, drums; Luke Wills, bass.				
50-S-6027	AWAKE BUT DREAMING		Unissued		
50-S-6028	JOLIE BLOND LIKES THE BOOGIE (Wills - Jones - Kierney)	T. Moore	MGM 10681		
50-S-6029	PASTIME BLUES (Wills - B. J. Wills - Kierney)	J. Widener	MGM 10681		
	NOTE: Take numbers are not available for the above titles, which were performed at the Trianon Ballroom. The recording was done at a radio station via telephone line hookup with the ballroom. Only one microphone was used at the ballroom for these recordings.				
Radio Recorders Hollywood, California April 27, 1950	Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Billy Bowman, steel guitar; Keith Coleman, fiddle; Johnny Gimble, fiddle & electric mandolin; Jack Loyd, bass; Laura Lee McBride, vocal; Myrl "Rusty" McDonald, tenor banjo; Tommy Perkins, drums (on B. J. Wills vocal & trio vocal sides); Eldon Shamblin, electric guitar; Mancel Tierney, piano; Jimmie Widener, tenor banjo; Billy Jack Wills, drums; Luke Wills, bass & tenor banjo.				

MASTER NO.	TITLE & COMPOSER CREDIT	LEAD VOCAL	78 RPM	45 RPM	33 1/3 RPM
50-S-3077-4	FADED LOVE (B. Wills - J. Wills)	M. McDonald; + B. J. Wills, B. Bowman, & J. Widener	MGM 10786	MGM K10786, MGM K12985	MGM 1SE-33ST
50-S-3078-3	AWAKE BUT DREAMING (Mayo - Wills)	J. Loyd	MGM 11377	MGM K11377	HH HHLP5006
50-S-3079-2	I BETCHA' MY HEART I LOVE YOU (Miller - Van Sciver)	L. McBride	MGM 10934	MGM K10934	
50-S-3080-1	I LAUGH WHEN I THINK HOW I CRIED OVER YOU (Fowler - Wills)	J. Widener	MGM 10934	MGM K10934	
50-S-3081-1	I'LL BE LUCKY SOME DAY (McBride - Martin - Wills)	M. McDonald	MGM 11213	MGM K11213	HH HHLP5006
50-S-3082	No data available				
50-S-3083-2	ROCK-A-BYE BABY BLUES (Wills - Tierney - Wills)	B. J. Wills	MGM 10731		HH HHLP5006
50-S-3084-2	I'M DOTTING EACH "I" WITH A TEARDROP (Blackman - Metzger - Wills)	M. McDonald	MGM 10980	MGM K10980	
?	'TATER PIE (Walker)	J. Loyd; + J. Gimble & J. Widener	MGM 10836	MGM K10836	
?	I DIDN'T REALIZE (McDonald - Wills)	M. McDonald	MGM 10836	MGM K10836	
?	THE END OF THE LINE (Gimble - Wills)	J. Gimble; + J. Widener & possibly K. Coleman	MGM 10898	MGM K10898	HH HHLP5006

NOTE: Master numbers are not available for the last three songs listed above, but they were recorded during this session. One would most likely be 50-S-3082, while the others would fall at the beginning and/or end of the session.

Dallas, Texas
May 28, 1951

Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Joe Andrews, bass; Billy Briggs, saxophone; Skeeter Elkins, piano; Joe Ferguson (possibly), bass; Joe Holley (possibly), fiddle; Bobby Koeffer, steel guitar; Paul Magee (possibly), drums; Romona Reed, vocal; Eldon Shamblin (possibly), electric guitar; Ocie Stockard (possibly), tenor banjo and fiddle.

51-S-6071	LITTLE GIRL, LITTLE GIRL (Wills)	B. Wills & R. Reed	MGM 11452	MGM K11452	
51-S-6072	I'M TIRED OF LIVING THIS LIE (McBride)	R. Reed	MGM 11024	MGM K11024	HH HHLP5006
51-S-6073	PLINEY JANE (Walker)	J. Andrews	MGM 11024	MGM K11024	HH HHLP5006

NOTE: Take numbers are not available for the above titles.

Radio Recorders
Hollywood, California
September 11, 1951

Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Joe Andrews, vocal; Carolina Cotton, vocal; Skeeter Elkins, piano; Joe Ferguson, bass; Joe Holley, fiddle; Bobby Koeffer, steel guitar; Paul Magee, drums; Ocie Stockard, banjo; Cotton Whittington, electric guitar.

51-S-3126-8	TWINKLE STAR (Wills)	Instrumental	MGM 11163	MGM K11163	
51-S-3127-4	BROWN SKIN GAL (Wills)	Instrumental	MGM 11119	MGM K11119	
51-S-3128-10	SITTIN' ON TOP OF THE WORLD (Wills)	B. Wills	MGM 11452	MGM K11452	
51-S-3129-1	SILVER BELL (Wills)	Instrumental	MGM 11082	MGM K11082	

Radio Recorders
Hollywood, California
September 12, 1951

Personnel note: Ocie Stockard may also double on fiddle today.

51-S-3130-9	THE LAST GOODBYE (Walker)	B. Wills	MGM 11082	MGM K11082	
51-S-3131	No data available				
51-S-3132-4	SEND ME A RED ROSE (Walker)	J. Ferguson	MGM 11119	MGM K11119	
51-S-3133-5	HUBBIN' IT (Walker)	J. Andrews	MGM 11213, Eucom 14 (12")	MGM K11213	HH HHLP5006
51-S-3134-2	I CAN'T STAND THIS LONELINESS (Wilson)	J. Andrews	MGM 11163	MGM K11163	

MASTER NO.	TITLE & COMPOSER CREDIT	LEAD VOCAL	78 RPM	45 RPM	33 1/3 RPM
Radio Recorders Hollywood, California September 17, 1951					
51-S-3137-4	THREE MILES SOUTH OF CASH IN ARKANSAS (Cotton)	B. Wills & C. Cotton	MGM 11288	MGM K11288	
51-S-3138-8	I'M ALL ALONE (Walker)	B. Wills & C. Cotton	MGM 11288	MGM K11288	
?	'CAUSE I'M IN LOVE (Jones)	C. Cotton	MGM 11130	MGM K11130	
?	YOU ALWAYS KEEP ME IN HOT WATER (Cotton - Thorpe)	C. Cotton	MGM 11130	MGM K11130	

NOTE: Master numbers are not available for the last two songs listed above, but they were probably recorded on September 17, 1951. Primary artist credit for the latter two sides is to Carolina Cotton. Labels also credit Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys in smaller type. Take number designations for all September, 1951, recordings include false starts.

NOTE: Bob Wills and his band also made seven film shorts in September, 1951, for Snader Telescriptions. Each short consisted of one song; these songs were subsequently issued on budget-label LP records. See details at the end of the MGM discography.

WFAA Studios
Dallas, Texas
March 25, 1952

Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Joe Andrews, bass; Keith Coleman, fiddle; Skeeter Elkins, piano; Darrell Glenn, vocal; Joe Holley, fiddle; Paul Magee, drums; V. O. "Shorty" Messer, steel guitar; Romona Reed, vocal; Eldon Shamblin, electric guitar; Ocie Stockard, tenor banjo; Bob White, steel guitar; Luke Wills, bass.

52-S-6035	I WON'T BE BACK TONIGHT (Glenn)	D. Glenn	MGM 11568	MGM K11568	
52-S-6036	CHARLIE CHANGED HIS MIND	R. Reed	Unissued		
52-S-6037	I'M ONLY A FRIEND	Trio	Unissued		
52-S-6038	STEAMBOAT STOMP (Payne)	K. Coleman	MGM 11377	MGM K11377	HH HHLP5006

WFAA Studios
Dallas, Texas
March 26, 1952

52-S-6039	I WANT TO BE WANTED (Atcher)	J. Andrews	MGM 11241	MGM K11241	
52-S-6040	SNATCHIN' AND GRABBIN' (Rose - Scrivner)	J. Holley	MGM 11241	MGM K11241	
52-S-6041	A RED HOT NEEDLE (Hudgins)	Trio	MGM 11322	MGM K11322	HH HHLP5006
52-S-6042	TROUBLE, TROUBLE BLUES (Arr. Acuff)	B. Wills	MGM 11322	MGM K11322	

NOTE: Take numbers are not available for the WFAA Studio recordings. The steel guitarist Bob White is not to be confused with Bob White the fiddler, who performed on the session of January, 1950.

Radio Recorders
Hollywood, California
March 16, 1953

Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Jesse Ashlock, fiddle; Billy Bowman, steel guitar; Skeeter Elkins, piano; Jack Greenback, drums; Jack Loyd, bass; Jay Roberts, guitar; Eldon Shamblin, electric guitar; Billy Jack Wills, vocal; Luke Wills, bass.

53-S-3014-7	A BROKEN HEART FOR A SOUVENIR (Reinhart)	J. Loyd	MGM 11516	MGM K11516	
53-S-3015-5	(EVERYONE IS CALLING YOU A) FALLEN ANGEL (Walker)	J. Roberts	MGM 11709	MGM K11709	
53-S-3016-11	SHE'S THE QUARTER HORSE TYPE (OF A GAL) (Wills)	B. J. Wills	MGM 11709	MGM K11709	
53-S-3017-3	B. BOWMAN HOP (Bowman)	Instrumental	MGM 11568	MGM K11568, MGM E-3352, MGM X-1239 MGM SE-4866, MGM GAS-141	
53-S-3018-2	AS I SIT BROKEN-HEARTED (Wills)	B. Wills	MGM 11635	MGM K11635, MGM E-3352, MGM X-1237 Met M-594, Met MS-594	
53-S-3019-7	BOTTLE BABY BOOGIE (McKinney)	B. J. Wills	MGM 11635	MGM K11635	
53-S-3020-5	I WANT TO GO TO MEXICO (Walker)	J. Loyd	MGM 11516	MGM K11516	

NOTE: Take number designations for this session include false starts.

MASTER NO.	TITLE & COMPOSER CREDIT	LEAD VOCAL	78 RPM	45 RPM	33 1/3 RPM
Radio Recorders Hollywood, California March 8, 1954	Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Billy Bowman, steel guitar; Skeeter Elkins, piano; Claude Fewell, banjo; Johnny Megetto (possibly), drums; Lee Ross, bass; Eldon Shamblin, electric guitar; Louis Tierney, fiddle & saxophone; Billy Jack Wills, bass.				
54-S-3033-6	I HIT THE JACKPOT (WHEN I WON YOU) (Simpson)	L. Ross	MGM 11767	MGM K11767, MGM X-1238	MGM E-3352, Met M-594, Met MS-594
54-S-3034	No available data				
54-S-3035	No available data				
54-S-3036-4	ST. LOUIS BLUES (Handy)	B. Wills	MGM 11832	MGM K11832, MGM X-1238	MGM E-3352, MGM SE-4866, MGM GAS-141, Met M-594, Met MS-594
Radio Recorders Hollywood, California March 9, 1954					
54-S-3037-6	SO LONG, I'LL SEE YOU LATER (Lloyd)	L. Ross	MGM 11985	MGM K11985, MGM X-1238	MGM E-3352, Met M-594, Met MS-594
54-S-3038-1	CADILLAC IN MODEL "A" (Wills)	B. J. Wills	MGM 11883	MGM K11883, MGM X-1239	MGM E-3352, MGM SE-4866, MGM GAS-141, Met M-594, Met MS-594
54-S-3039-1	WALTZING IN OLD SAN ANTONE (Henson - Sanders)	L. Ross	MGM 11883	MGM K11883, MGM X-1237	MGM E-3352, MGM SE-4866, MGM GAS-141, Met M-594, Met MS-594
54-S-3040-2	I'VE GOT A NEW ROAD UNDER MY WHEELS (Dude Rancher)	L. Ross	MGM 11832	MGM K11832, MGM X-1239	MGM E-3352, Met M-594, Met MS-594
54-S-3041-4	TEXAS BLUES (Philips)	L. Ross	MGM 11767	MGM K11767, MGM X-1237	MGM E-3352, MGM SE-4866, MGM GAS-141, Met M-594, Met MS-594
54-S-3042-2	I LIVE FOR YOU (Lindsay)	L. Ross	MGM 11985	MGM K11985, MGM X-1237	MGM E-3352, Met M-594, Met MS-594
?	DOIN' THE BUNNY HOP (Fewell)	C. Fewell		MGM X-1238	MGM E-3352, MGM SE-4866, MGM GAS 141
?	A MAIDEN'S PRAYER (Wills)	L. Ross		MGM X-2139	MGM E-3352, Met M-594, Met MS-594

NOTE: Master numbers are not available for the last two songs listed above, but they most likely fill the gaps for 54-S-3034 and 54-S-3035. Take number designations include false starts.

SNADER TELESCRIPTIONS

Studio Films, Inc.
Hollywood, California
September, 1951

Session Personnel: See listing for MGM session of September 11, 1951.

CUT NUMBER	TITLE & COMPOSER CREDIT	LEAD VOCAL	16MM FILM	33 1/3 RPM RECORDS
10101	YODEL MOUNTAIN (No CC)	C. Cotton	S.T. 10101	Camay 3029, Coronet CX-281, Coronet CXS-281, Premier PM-9046, Premier PS-9046
10102	THREE MILES SOUTH OF CASH (Carolina Cotton) (from Camay 3040)	C. Cotton & B. Wills	S.T. 10102	Camay 3040, Coronet CX-281, Coronet CXS-281, Premier PM-9046, Premier PS-9046
10103	FIDDLIN' MAN	Instrumental	S.T. 10103	Camay 3023
10104	IDA RED (Wava White) (from Camay 3001)	J. Andrews	S.T. 10104	Camay 3001, Coronet CX-281, Coronet CXS-281, Spinorama M-180, Spinorama S-180, Premier PM-9046, Premier PS-9046, Premier PM-9051, Premier PS-9051
10105	DEEP WATER (No CC)	J. Andrews	S.T. 10105	Spinorama M-180, Spinorama S-180, Premier PM-9051, Premier PS-9051
10106	SITTIN' ON TOP OF THE WORLD (No CC)	B. Wills	S.T. 10106	Coronet CX-281, Coronet CXS-281, Premier PM-9046, Premier PS-9046
10107	BLUE PRELUDE (No CC)	J. Ferguson	S.T. 10107	Coronet CX-281, Coronet CXS-281, Premier PM-9046, Premier PS-9046

NOTE: "Ida Red" is incorrectly credited as "Fiddlin' Man" on Coronet CX-281 and CXS-281. The same may be true for Premier PM-9046 and PS-9046.

MASTER NO.	TITLE & COMPOSER CREDIT	LEAD VOCAL	78 RPM	45 RPM	33 1/3 RPM

DECCA/MCA RECORDS

Los Angeles, California
January 24, 1955

Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Darla Daret, vocal; Skeeter Elkins, piano; Claude Fewell, drums; Kenny Lowrey, guitar; Jack Loyd, bass; Tiny Moore, electric mandolin & fiddle; Cotton Roberts, fiddle; Vance Terry, steel guitar.

MASTER NO.	TITLE & COMPOSER CREDIT	LEAD VOCAL	78 RPM	45 RPM	33 1/3 RPM
L 8132	NEW OSAGE STOMP (Bob Wills)	Instrumental	De 29682	De 9-29682, De ED2224 (EP)	De DL5562 (10"), Vo VL3735, Vo VL73735
L 8133	CARNATIONS FOR THE MEMORY (Charles Tebbetts)	J. Loyd			Vo VL3922
L 8134	TOO MUCH MAMBO	J. Loyd	Unissued		
L 8135	ECHO YODEL (Betty Daret - Darla Daret)	D. Daret	De 29682	De 9-29682	Vo VL3735, Vo VL73735
L 8136	NEW DREAMY EYED WALTZ (Bob Wills)	K. Lowrey			Vo VL73922
L 8137	BLACK AND BLUE RAG (Bob Wills)	Instrumental		De ED2224 (EP)	De DL5562 (10"), Vo VL73922
L 8138	SINCERELY (Harvey Fuqua - Allen Freed)	J. Loyd	De 29432	De 9-29432	Vo VL3735, Vo VL73735
L 8139	CORNBALL RAG (Eddy Manson)	Instrumental	De 29432	De 9-29432	Vo VL3735, Vo VL73735

Los Angeles, California
January 25, 1955

L 8140	BEAUMONT RAG (Bob Wills)	Instrumental		De ED2224 (EP)	De DL5562 (10"), De DL8730, Vo VL3805, Vo VL73805, MCA 2-4092, JaMCA MCL-1075
L 8141	DON'T LET THE DEAL GO DOWN (Bob Wills)	Instrumental		De ED2224 (EP)	De DL5562 (10"), Vo VL 73922
L 8142	I'LL FOLLOW YOU WHEREVER YOU GO (M. "Whitey" Simpson)	K. Lowrey	De 29604	De 9-29604	AFRS W-983 (16")
L 8143	FOUR OR FIVE TIMES (Byron Gay - Marco H. Hellman)	B. Wills		De ED2223 (EP)	De DL5562 (10"), Vo VL73922, MCA 2-4092
L 8144	SAN ANTONIO ROSE (Bob Wills)	J. Loyd	De 29604	De 9-29604, De ED2223 (EP)	De DL5562 (10"), De DL8730, De DL4134, AFRS W-983 (16"), Vo VL73922, JaMCA 3013-17, JaMCA MCL-1075, WGeMCA COPS7361, RD RDA-142-A
L 8145	SPANISH TWO-STEP (Bob Wills - Tommy Duncan)	J. Loyd		De ED2223 (EP)	De DL5562 (10"), De DL8730, Vo VL3805, Vo VL73805, JaMCA MCL-1075
L 8146	LONE STAR RAG (Bob Wills)	Instrumental		De ED2223 (EP)	De DL5562 (10"), De DL8727, De DL78727, MCA 526
L 8147	THE BOSTON FANCY (Dave Coleman)	D. Daret	De 29453	De 9-29453	Vo VL3735, Vo VL73735
L 8148	HOOPAW RAG (Bob Wills - Vance Terry)	Instrumental			Vo VL73922
L 8149	DON'T KEEP IT A SECRET (Don Larkin - Joe Simpson)	J. Loyd	De 29453	De 9-29453	Vo VL3735, Vo VL73735

Nashville, Tennessee (?)
September 29, 1955

Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Billy Bowman, steel guitar; Claude Fewell (possibly), drums; Art McNulty, piano; Lee Ross, bass; Marvin Shaw, trumpet; Lew Walker, electric guitar; Luke Wills, bass.

88703	ROLL YOUR OWN (Lewis Walker - Bob Wills)	Instrumental			Vo VL73922
88704	MY SHOES KEEP WALKING BACK TO YOU (Lee Ross - Bob Wills)	L. Ross	De 30068 AuFe DW-08	De 9-30068, AuFe DW-08	De DL4775, De DL74775, Vo VL73922
88705	I WONDER IF YOU FEEL THE WAY I DO		Unissued		

Los Angeles, California
January 23, 1956

Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Billy Bowman, steel guitar; Johnny Dalton, drums; Darla Daret, vocal; Lee Ross, bass; Louis Tierney, fiddle & saxophone; Lew Walker, electric guitar; Luke Wills, bass.

L 8939	SUGAR BABY (Betty Daret - Darla Daret)	D. Daret	De 29909	De 9-29909	Vo VL3735, Vo VL73735
L 8940	SO LET'S ROCK (Cindy Walker)	L. Ross	De 29909	De 9-29909	Vo VL3735, Vo VL73735
L 8941	THE BUNNY WITH THE POWDER PUFF TAIL (Fred Kirby)	L. Walker			WGeMCA COPS7848, WGeMCA 6.28347DS
L 8942	TEXAS FIDDLER (Bob Wills)	Instrumental	De 30068, AuFe DW-08	De 9-30068, AuFe DW-08	Vo VL3735, Vo VL73735

Nashville, Tennessee
November 12, 1956

Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Jimmy Benjamin, drums; Billy Bowman, steel guitar; Gary Cummings, vocal; Tommy Jackson, fiddle; Millard Kelso, piano; Lew Walker, electric guitar; Lloyd Wheeler, fiddle; Luke Wills, bass.

MASTER NO.	TITLE & COMPOSER CREDIT	LEAD VOCAL	78 RPM	45 RPM	33 1/3 RPM
NA 9556 (101,030)	ORANGE BLOSSOM SPECIAL (Ervin T. Rouse)	Instrumental			De DL8727, De DL78727, MCA 526
NA 9557 (101,031)	LITTLE STAR OF HEAVEN (No CC - See note below.)	Instrumental			Vo VL3735, Vo VL73735
Na 9558 (101,032)	IT'S THE BOTTLE TALKIN' (Cindy Walker)	L. Walker	De 30165	De 9-30165	

NOTE: Although "Little Star of Heaven" appears on Vo VL3735 & Vo VL73735, the record label and jacket indicate the song to be "It's the Bottle Talkin'." Consequently, there is no composer credit for "Little Star of Heaven."

Nashville, Tennessee
November 13, 1956

NA 9559 (101,024)	GOTTA WALK ALONE		Unissued		
NA 9560 (101,025)	LILLY DALE (Billy Jack Wills - Tiny Moore)	G. Cummings	De 30165	De 9-30165	Vo VL3735, Vo VL73735
NA 9561 (101,026)	NEW FADED LOVE (John Wills - Bob Wills)	L. Walker			De DL8727, De DL78727, MCA 526
NA 9562 (101,027)	TOODLEUMBO (Cindy Walker)	B. Bowman			De DL8727, De DL78727, MCA 526
NA 9563 (101,028)	BOB'S BREAKDOWN (Bob Wills)	Instrumental			De DL8727, De DL78727, MCA 526
NA 9564	No data available				
NA 9565 (101,029)	WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH THE MILL			Unissued	

NOTE: The master numbers with the NA prefix are ones assigned in Nashville. The numbers in parentheses are ones assigned by Decca Records in New York. The vocalist on NA 9565 may have been Webb Pierce.

Los Angeles, California
February 27, 1957

Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Jimmy Benjamin, drums; Billy Bowman, steel guitar; Gary Cummings, vocal; Darla Daret (possibly with vocal assistance on L 9891); Millard Kelso, piano; Lew Walker, electric guitar; Luke Wills, bass.

L 9881	BETTY'S WALTZ (Bob Wills)	Instrumental	De DL8727, De DL78727, MCA 526
L 9882	WILLS BREAKDOWN (Bob Wills)	Instrumental	De DL8727, De DL78727, MCA 526
L 9883	LA GOLONDRINA (No CC)	Instrumental	De DL8727, De DL78727, MCA 526
L 9884	TEXAS TWO STEP (Bob Wills)	Instrumental	De DL8727, De DL78727, MCA 526

Los Angeles, California
February 28, 1957

L 9889	WAIT'LL YOU SEE (Bob Wills - Wilbur Jones)	B. Wills			De DL8727, De DL78727, MCA 526
L 9890	AN OLD FLAME (Billy Jack Wills)	G. Cummings			De DL8727, De DL78727, MCA 526
L 9891	OH MONAH (Ted Weems - Humphrey Washburn)	L. Wills	De 30367, AuFe DW-043	De 9-30367, AuFe DW-043	Vo VL3735, Vo 73735
L 9892	I'LL ALWAYS BE IN LOVE WITH YOU (Lew Walker)	L. Walker	De 30367, AuFe DW-043	De 9-30367, AuFe DW-043	Vo VL73922
L 9893	WITH TEARS IN MY EYES (Paul Howard)	B. Bowman			De DL8727, De DL78727, MCA 526

MASTER NO.	TITLE & COMPOSER CREDIT	LEAD VOCAL	45 RPM	33 1/3 RPM

LIBERTY RECORDS
(Rights now owned by United Artists)

Radio Recorders
Hollywood, California
April 21, 1960

Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Gene Crownover, steel guitar; Tommy Duncan, vocal; Joe Holley, fiddle; Jack Lloyd, clarinet; Wade Peeler, drums; Leon Rausch, electric guitar; Glenn Rhees, saxophone; Luke Wills, electric bass. Leon Rausch also sings vocal harmony on some selections.

(LB-1198)	AFTER ALL (Lee Ross)	T. Duncan	Li F-55311	Li LRP3194, Li LST7194
(LB-1103)	THE IMAGE OF ME (Harlan Howard)	T. Duncan	Li F-55264	
	DRY YOUR DARLIN' EYES		Unissued	
(LB-1102)	GOODBYE LIZA JANE (Wills - Duncan)	T. Duncan	Li F-55264	
(LB-1199)	IT MAY BE TOO LATE (Wills - Duncan)	T. Duncan	Li F-55311	

MASTER NO.	TITLE & COMPOSER CREDIT	LEAD VOCAL	45 RPM	33 1/3 RPM
(LB-1094)	WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH THE MILL (Bob Wills)	T. Duncan	Li F-55260	
(LB-1095)	HEART TO HEART TALK (Lee Ross)	T. Duncan	Li F-55260, Li F-54522, UA XW041, Li LSX1012 (EP)	Li LRP3182, Li LST7182, Li LRP3305, Li LST7569, UA LA412-E

NOTE: Master numbers in parentheses are ones assigned after the recording session and do not indicate recording sequence. Liberty and United Artists have refrained from applying master numbers at the time of recording. This discography lists songs in recording sequence if known. If such information is not available, the songs are listed alphabetically. The above session is in sequence, except for "Heart to Heart Talk," which could have come at the beginning of the session.

Radio Recorders
Hollywood, California
July 1, 1960

Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Gene Crownover, steel guitar; Tommy Duncan, vocal; Jack Lloyd, clarinet; Wade Peeler, drums; Leon Rausch, electric guitar; Glenn Rhees, saxophone; Luke Wills, bass.

DUSTY SKIES (Cindy Walker)	T. Duncan		Li LRP3173, Li LST7173
GOODNIGHT LITTLE SWEETHEART (Bob Wills)	T. Duncan		Li LRP3173, Li LST7173, Su SUM1108, Su SUS5108
IDA RED (Moore - Wills)	T. Duncan		Li LRP3173, Li LST7173, Ua UAS9962, JaLi 9342
NOTE: "Ida Red" is incorrectly titled on some issues as "Ida Red Likes the Boogie."			
KEEPER OF MY HEART (Wills - Irby)	T. Duncan		Li LRP3173, Li LST7173
THE KIND OF LOVE I CAN'T FORGET (Jessie Ashlock)	T. Duncan		Li LRP3173, Li LST7173, Su SUM1108, Su SUS5108, UA UAS9962, JaLi 9342
A MAIDEN'S PRAYER (Bob Wills)	T. Duncan		Li LRP3173, Li LST7173
SAN ANTONIO ROSE (Bob Wills)	T. Duncan	Li F-54522, Li F-50931, UA XW041, Li LSX1012 (EP)	Li LRP3173, Li LST7173, Li LRP3345, Li LST7570, Su SUM1108, Su SUS5108, UA UAS9962, St SLP263, St SLP295, St SLP375, St SLP469, UA LA413-E, JaLi 9341, CMRC LP-GC1002
SPANISH TWO-STEP (Duncan - Wills)	T. Duncan		Li LRP3173, Li LST7173, Li LRP3382, Li LST7571
STAY A LITTLE LONGER (Duncan - Wills)	T. Duncan	Li LSX1012 (EP)	Li LRP3173, Li LST7173, Su SUM1108, Su SUS5108, UA UAS9962, JaLi 9342
TAKE ME BACK TO TULSA (Wills - Duncan)	T. Duncan		Li LRP3173, Li LST7173, Su SUM1108, Su SUS5108, UA UAS9962, JaLi 9342
TIME CHANGES EVERYTHING (Tommy Duncan)	T. Duncan	Li LSX1012 (EP)	Li LRP3173, Li LST7173, Su SUM1108, Su SUS5108, UA UAS9962, St SLP256, St SLP375, St SLP451, St SLP469, JaLi 9341, CMRC LP-GC1006
YOU DON'T LOVE ME BUT I'LL ALWAYS CARE (Lou Wayne)	T. Duncan		Li LRP3173, Li LST7173

NOTE: Some Starday (St) issues were also released in stereo with a 9- prefix to the release number. Thus, St SLP451 would become St SLP9-451 on a stereo release.

Radio Recorders
Hollywood, California
November 21, 1960

Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Gene Crownover, steel guitar; Tommy Duncan, vocal; Joe Holley, fiddle; Jack Lloyd, clarinet; Wade Peeler, drums; Leon Rausch, electric guitar; Glenn Rhees, saxophone; Luke Wills, bass.

NANCY JANE	T. Duncan	Unissued	
CONVICT AND THE ROSE (Arr. Wills - Duncan)	T. Duncan		Li LRP3182, Li LST7182, Su SUM1108, Su SUS5108
SILVER BELLS (Arr. Wills - Duncan)	Instrumental		Li LRP3182, Li LST7182, UA UAS9962, JaLi 9341
MY CONFESSION (Bob Wills)	T. Duncan		Li LRP3182, Li LST7182
TROUBLE IN MIND (R. M. Jones)	T. Duncan		Li LRP3182, Li LST7182
LI'L LIZA JANE (Arr. Wills - Duncan)	T. Duncan		Li LRP3182, Li LST7182, Su SUM1108, Su SUS5108, UA UAS9962, JaLi 9342
I WONDER IF YOU FEEL THE WAY I DO (Bob Wills)	T. Duncan		Li LRP3182, Li LST7182
IT MAKES NO DIFFERENCE NOW (J. Davis - F. Tillman)	T. Duncan		Li LRP3182, Li LST7182, UA UAS9962, JaLi 9342
PLAYBOY MEDLEY (Wills - Duncan)	Calls by T. Duncan		Li LRP3182, Li LST7182, Su SUM1108, Su SUS5108, UA UAS9962, JaLi 9341

MASTER NO.	TITLE & COMPOSER CREDIT	LEAD VOCAL	45 RPM	33 1/3 RPM
	WABASH BLUES (Meinken - Ringle)	T. Duncan & B. Wills (duet)		Li LRP3182, Li LST7182, Su SUM1108, Su SUS5108, UA UAS9962, JaLi 9342
	HANG YOUR HEAD IN SHAME (F. Rose - S. Nelson - E. Nelson)	T. Duncan		Li LRP3182, Li LST7182, UA UAS9962, JaLi 9341
	RIGHT OR WRONG (Sizemore - Gillespie - Biese)	T. Duncan		Li LRP3182, Li LST7182
	CRYIN' WON'T MAKE ME STAY		Unissued	

NOTE: Songs for this session are listed in recording sequence, except, possibly, for "Cryin' Won't Make Me Stay." Also, there is some doubt about the recording date or dates commencing with "My Confession." According to the data received at the time the Record Research discography originally appeared, all songs, except for "Cryin' Won't Make Me Stay," were recorded on November 21, 1960. No information was supplied at that time for "Cryin' Won't Make Me Stay." New information suggests, however, that all recordings commencing with "My Confession" were recorded on December 1, 1960.

Radio Recorders
Hollywood, California
July 24, 1961

Session Personnel: George Clayborn, fiddle; Gene Crownover, steel guitar; Tommy Duncan, vocal; Joe Holley, fiddle; Gene "Tag" Lambert, electric guitar; Frank McWhorter, fiddle; Wade Peeler, drums; Leon Rausch, electric guitar; Luke Wills, bass.

	SHE'S KILLIN' ME	T. Duncan	Unissued	
	CINDY (Wills - Duncan)	T. Duncan		Li LRP3194, Li LST7194
(LB-1408)	OKLAHOMA GALS (Wills - Duncan)	T. Duncan	Li 55450	
(LB-1304)	I'M CRYING MY HEART OUT (Cindy Walker)	T. Duncan & L. Rausch (duet)	Li F-55378	
(LB-1409)	TOMORROW I'LL CRY (Les York)	T. Duncan	Li 55450	
(LB-1305)	SIESTA (Travis - Wills - Duncan)	T. Duncan & L. Rausch (duet)	Li F-55378	

NOTE: Bob Wills is not present for today's session. His voice tracks were recorded on July 25.

Radio Recorders
Hollywood, California
July 25, 1961

Session Personnel: Same as for previous session, except that Bob Wills is present on fiddle.

SNOW DEER (Wenrick - Mahoney)	T. Duncan		Li LRP3194, Li LST7194
MISSISSIPPI RIVER BLUES (J. Rodgers)	T. Duncan		Li LRP3194, Li LST7194
DEEP WATER (Fred Rose)	T. Duncan		Li LRP3194, Li LST7194
BLUES FOR DIXIE (Mayo)	T. Duncan		Li LRP3194, Li LST7194, UA UAS9962, JaLi 9341
BUBBLES IN MY BEER (Walker - Wills - Duncan)	T. Duncan	Li 50931	Li LRP3194, Li LST7194, St SLP306, St SLP375, St SLP469, Ua UAS9962, CMRC LP-GC1007, JaLi 9341
TIE ME TO YOUR APRON STRINGS AGAIN (Shay - Goodwin)	T. Duncan & L. Rausch (duet)		Li LRP3194, Li LST7194
GOOD OLE OKLAHOMA (Wills - Duncan)	T. Duncan		Li LRP3194, Li LST7194
ROLLY POLEY (Fred Rose)	T. Duncan		Li LRP3194, Li LST7194
WALKIN' IN THE SHADOW OF THE BLUES (Byrd - Duncan)	T. Duncan		Li LRP3194, Li LST7194
THE JOBOB RAG (Wills - Duncan)	Instrumental		Li LRP3194, Li LST7194, UA UAS9962, JaLi 9342

NOTE: The first five songs above are listed in recording sequence, as are the last five songs. However, which set of five came first is not known.

Radio Recorders
Hollywood, California
May 7, 1963

Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Tommy Allsup, rhythm guitar & bass; Billy Armstrong, fiddle; Vikki Carr, vocal backup; Buzz Cason, vocal backup; George Clayborn, fiddle; Cliff Crofford, vocal backup; Gene Crownover, steel guitar; Casey Dickens, drums; Gene Garf, piano; Gene Gasaway, fiddle; Billy Mize, vocal backup; Johnny Patterson, electric guitar; Louis Tierney, fiddle; Luke Wills, bass; Billy Wright, viola.

MAIDEN'S PRAYER (Arr. B. Wills - S. Gibbs)	Instrumental	Li LRP3303, Li LST7303, Su SUS5248, St SLP360, St SLP375, St SLP469, UA UAS9962, JaLi 9341
BOOT HILL DRAG (B. Wills - H. Remington)	Instrumental	Li LRP3303, Li LST7303, Su SUS5248, UA UAS9962, JaLi 9342
YEARNING (JUST FOR YOU) (Davis - Burke)	B. Wills	Li LRP3303, Li LST7303, Su SUS5248, UA UAS9962, JaLi 9342
MY CONFESSION (Bob Wills)	B. Wills	Li LRP3303, Li LST7303, Su SUS5248, UA UAS9962, JaLi 9341

MASTER NO.	TITLE & COMPOSER CREDIT	LEAD VOCAL	45 RPM	33 1/3 RPM
	ST. LOUIS BLUES	B. Wills	Unissued	
	BIG BEAVER	Instrumental	Unissued	
Radio Recorders Hollywood, California May 8, 1963				
	SOUTH (Bennie Moten)	Instrumental		Li LRP3303, Li LST7303, SuSUS5248
	JUST FRIENDS	Instrumental	Unissued	
	ROSETTA (Hines - Woods)	B. Wills	Li 55594	Li LRP3303, Li LST7303, Su SUS5248
	MY MARY (Davis - Hamblen)	B. Wills		Li LRP3303, Li LST7303, Su SUS5248
	SITTIN' ON TOP OF THE WORLD (Bob Wills)	B. Wills		Li LRP3303, Li LST7303, Su SUS5248, UA UAS9962, JaLi 9342
(LB-1669)	BLUES IN "A" (B. Wills - S. Gibbs)	Instrumental	Li 55594	Li LRP3303, Li LST7303, UA UAS9962, JaLi 9341
	WILL YOU MISS ME WHEN I'M GONE (J. Lee Wills - Henry Boatman)	L. Wills		Li LRP3303, Li LST7303, Su SUS5248, UA UAS9962, JaLi 9341
	SNAP YOUR FINGERS (Martin - Zanetis)	G. Clayborn		Li LRP3303, Li LST7303
	HEARTSTRINGS		Unissued	
Radio Recorders Hollywood, California May 10, 1963				
	DON'T LET THE DEAL GO DOWN (B. Wills - S. Gibbs)	Instrumental		Li LRP3303, Li LST7303, Su SUS5248

LONGHORN RECORDS

Sumet Studios, Dallas, Texas, Ca. early spring, 1964 — Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Joe Andrews, vocal; George Clayborn, fiddle; Gene Crownover, steel guitar; Gene Gasaway, fiddle; Johnny Gimble, fiddle; Benny Johnson, piano; Bob McBay, drums; Johnny Patterson, electric guitar; Luke Wills (possibly), bass.

(SoN 5811)	SOONER OR LATER (YOU'LL FALL) (Wills - Glenn)	J. Andrews	Lo 544	
(SoN 5812)	BUFFALO TWIST (Wills - Gimble)	G. Clayborn	Lo 544	
(SoN 7911)	ALL NIGHT LONG (Wills - Gimble)	J. Andrews	Lo 545	
(SoN 7912)	YOU CAN'T BREAK A HEART (Wills - Andrews)	J. Andrews	Lo 545	

Dallas, Texas, Ca. summer, 1964 — Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Maurice Anderson, steel guitar; Joe Andrews, vocal; Billy Carter, electric guitar; Gene Crownover, steel guitar; Luke Wills, bass; unknown drum

(SoN 11011)	IF HE'S MOVIN' IN (Wills - Miller - Morris)	J. Andrews	Lo 550	
(SoN 11012)	LET'S GET IT OVER AND DONE WITH (Bob Wills - Billy Carter)	J. Andrews	Lo 550	

Sumet Studios, Dallas, Texas, November 19, 1964 — Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; C. G. "Sleepy" Johnson, guitar; Marvin Montgomery, banjo; Luke Wills, bass. Joe Andrews, Dewey Groom, and Homer Harrison are also present and make comments.

	BIG TATERS IN THE SANDY LAND (Arr. by Bob Wills)	Instrumental		Lo LP-001
	MAYFLOWER WALTZ (Arr. by Bob Wills)	Instrumental		Lp LP-001
	BILLY IN THE LOW GROUND (Arr. by Bob Wills)	Instrumental		Lo LP-001
	BEAUMONT RAG (Arr. by Bob Wills)	Instrumental		Lo LP-001, St SLP469
	FADED LOVE (Comp. by Bob & Uncle John Wills)	Instrumental		Lo LP-001
	DIAN WALTZ (Comp. by Bob Wills)	Instrumental		Lo LP-001
	DONE GONE (Arr. by Bob Wills)	Instrumental		Lo LP-001

MASTER NO.	TITLE & COMPOSER CREDIT	LEAD VOCAL	45 RPM	33 1/3 RPM
	PUT YOUR LITTLE FOOT (Arr. by Bob Wills)	Instrumental		Lo LP-001
	BOB'S FIRST FIDDLE TUNE (Arr. by Bob Wills)	Instrumental		Lo LP-001
	BOB'S SCHOTTISCHE (Comp. by Bob Wills)	Instrumental		Lo LP-001
	GONE INDIAN (Comp. by Bob Wills)	Instrumental		Lo LP-001
	NO DISAPPOINTMENTS IN HEAVEN (P.D.)	B. Wills		Lo LP-001, St SLP469
Balch Springs, Texas Ca. early spring, 1965	Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Joe Andrews, vocal; Gene Crownover, steel guitar; Harvey Gossman, trumpet; Walter Lyons, electric guitar; Al Stricklin, piano; Luke Wills, bass; unknown drummer.			
(SoN 18701)	FADED LOVE (Bob and Uncle John Wills)	J. Andrews	Lo 560	
(SoN 18702)	WILLS JUNCTION (Bob Wills)	Instrumental	Lo 560	
	YOU'LL NEVER WALK OUT OF MY HEART	J. Andrews	Unissued	
	BETTY'S WALTZ	Instrumental	Unissued	
	SAN ANTONIO ROSE	Instrumental	Unissued	
	KAPP RECORDS (Rights now owned by MCA Records)			
Columbia Studios Nashville, Tennessee October 19, 1965	Session Personnel: Bob Wills, vocal comments; Joe Andrews, vocal; Jim Belken, fiddle; Harold Bradley, electric guitar & banjo; Keith Coleman, fiddle; Murrey "Buddy" Harman, drums; Johnnie Manson, fiddle; Bob McBay, drums; Bob Moore, bass; Leon Rausch, vocal; Hargus "Pig" Robbins, piano; Albert Talley, steel guitar. Vocal trio comprised of Belken, Manson, & Rausch.			
K-9554	SHE WON'T LET ME FORGET HER (Westberry - Smith)	L. Rausch	Ka K744	
K-9555	I JUST CAN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE (Wakely - Weston)	J. Andrews	Ka KE105	Ka KL1506, Ka KS3506
K-9556	SHE'S KILLIN' ME (Claude Nichols)	J. Andrews	Ka K744	
K-9557	IF NO NEWS IS GOOD NEWS (Joe Gibson)	Trio		Ka KL1506, Ka KS3506
Columbia Studios Nashville, Tennessee July 19, 1966	Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Jim Belken, fiddle; Harold Bradley, electric guitar & tenor banjo; Jerry Case, guitar; Murrey "Buddy" Harman, drums; Jerry Howard, drums; Tommy Jackson, fiddle; Johnnie Manson, fiddle; Bob Moore, bass; Leon Rausch, vocal; Hargus "Pig" Robbins, piano; Phil Sperbeck, steel guitar.			
10184	YOU'RE THE ONLY STAR IN MY BLUE HEAVEN (Gene Autry)	L. Rausch	Ka K780	Ka KL1506, Ka KS3506, Ka KS3587, MCA 546, MCA 2-4092
10185	A BIG BALL IN COWTOWN (Hoyle Nix)	L. Rausch		Ka KL1506, Ka KS3506, Ka KS3641, MCA 153
10186	WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE (Petry - Wills)	L. Rausch		Ka KL1506, Ka KS3506
10187	GONE INDIAN (Bob Wills)	Instrumental		Ka KL1506, Ka KS3506
10188	PINTO BEANS (Floyd Wilson)	L. Rausch		Ka KL1506, Ka KS3506
Columbia Studios Nashville, Tennessee July 20, 1966	Session Personnel: Same as for July 19, 1966, except add Wayne Butler, trombone; Bob Phillips, trumpet; George Tidwell, trumpet.			
10189	GUESS I'LL MOVE ON DOWN THE LINE (Siegel - Sonenberg)	L. Rausch		Ka KL1506, Ka KS3506
10190	MY ADOBE HACIENDA (Massey - Penny)	L. Rausch	Ka K780, Ka KJB117, MCA 60086	Ka KL1506, Ka KS3506, Ka KS3641, MCA 153, MCA 2-4092
10191	WHAT'S FORT WORTH (Larry Lee)	L. Rausch		Ka KL1506, Ka KS3506
10192	DEEP IN THE HEART OF TEXAS (Hershey - Swander)	L. Rausch	Ka KE105, MCA 60087	Ka KL1506, Ka KS3506, Ka KS3587, Ka KL3641, MCA 546, MCA 153, MCA 2-4092
10193	KANSAS CITY (Leiber - Stroller)	J. Manson		Ka KL1506, Ka KS3506

MASTER NO.	TITLE & COMPOSER CREDIT	LEAD VOCAL	45 RPM	33 1/3 RPM
RCA Victor Studios Nashville, Tennessee March 21, 1967	Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Harold Bradley, electric guitar & tenor banjo; Wayne Butler, saxophone; Pete Drake, steel guitar; Ray Edenton, electric guitar; Gene Gasaway, fiddle; Murrey "Buddy" Harman, drums; Tommy Jackson, fiddle; Rufus Long, saxophone & clarinet; Bob Moore, bass; Bob Phillips, trumpet; Hargus "Pig" Robbins, piano; Billy Sanford, guitar; Norman "Buddy" Spicher, fiddle; George Tidwell, trumpet.			
10227	BIG BEAVER (Bob Wills)	Instrumental		Ka KL1523, Ka KS3523, Ka KS3587, MCA 543, MCA 546
10228	SAN ANTONIO ROSE (Wills)	Instrumental	Ka KJB116, MCA 60085	Ka KL1523, Ka KS3523, Ka KS3587, Ka KS3601, Ka KS3641, MCA 543, MCA 152, MCA 153, MCA 546, MCA 2-409 CMA 101, CMA CSM644
10229	EIGHT'R FROM DECATUR (Powell - Wills - Woody)	Instrumental	Ka K825	Ka KL1523, Ka KS3523, Ka KS3587, Ka KS3641, MCA 543, MCA 546, MCA 153, MCA 2-4092
10230	COMANCHE HIT AND RUN (Ashlock - Wills)	Instrumental		Ka KL1523, Ka KS3523, Ka KS3587, MCA 543, MCA 546
RCA Victor Studios Nashville, Tennessee March 22, 1967	Session Personnel: Same as for March 21, 1967, except add Gene "Tag" Lambert, vocal; Mel Tillis, vocal.			
10231	I NEEDED YOU (Gimble - Wills)	G. Lambert		Ka KL1523, Ka KS3523, MCA 543
10232	IF YOU'LL COME BACK TO ME		Unissued	
10233	SOMEWHERE SOUTH OF SAN ANTONE (Gimble - Wills)	G. Lambert		Ka KL1523, Ka KS3523, MCA 543
10234	FADED LOVE (Wills - Wills)	M. Tillis	Ka KE113, MCA 60087	Ka KL1523, Ka KS3523, MCA 543
10235	LET'S BE SURE WE KNOW (Clarence McKeel)	G. Lambert	Ka K825	Ka KL1523, Ka KS3523, MCA 543
RCA Victor Studies Nashville, Tennessee March 23, 1967				
10236	MEMPHIS (Chuck Berry)	M. Tillis	Ka KE113	Ka KL1523, Ka KS3523, MCA 543
10237	SUGARFOOT RAG (Garland - Vaughn)	M. Tillis		Ka KL1523, Ka KS3523, MCA 543
10238	I WISH I FELT THIS WAY AT HOME (Harlan Howard)	M. Tillis	Ka K842	Ka KL1523, Ka KS3523, MCA 543
10239	LOOKING OVER MY SHOULDER (Tillis - Peddy)	M. Tillis	Ka K842	Ka KL1523, Ka KS3523, MCA 543
RCA Victor Studios Nashville, Tennessee September 26, 1967	Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Harold Bradley, electric guitar; Wayne Butler, trombone; Fred Carter, guitar; Quitman Dennis, saxophone; Lloyd Green, steel guitar; Murrey "Buddy" Harman, drums; Tommy Jackson, fiddle; Grover "Shorty" Lavender, fiddle; Rufus Long, saxophone; Bob Moore, bass; Bob Phillips, trumpet; Hargus "Pig" Robbins, piano; Billy Sanford, banjo; Norman "Buddy" Spicher, fiddle; George Tidwell, trumpet; Don Tweedy, saxophone.			
10736	CIMARRON (Johnny Bond)	Instrumental		Ka KL1542, Ka KS3542, Ka KS3587, Ka KS3641, MCA 153, MCA 546, MCA 2-4092
10737	RIDERS IN THE SKY (Stan Jones)	Instrumental		Ka KL1542, Ka KS3542
10738	HERE'S THAT MAN AGAIN (Mel Stark)	Instrumental		Ka KL1542, Ka KS3542
10739	CANADIAN SUNSET (Gimbel - Heywood)	Instrumental		Ka KL1542, Ka KS3542
RCA Victor Studios Nashville, Tennessee September 27, 1967	Session Personnel: Same as for September 26, 1967, except add Gene "Tag" Lambert, vocal. Jan and Jerry Crutchfield are believed to be the twosome singing with Lambert on trio parts.			
10740	BORN TO LOVE YOU (Cindy Walker)	G. Lambert	Ka K886	Ka KL1542, Ka KS3542, Ka KS3587, MCA 546
10741	LILY DALE (Billy Jack Wills)	G. Lambert		Ka KL1542, Ka KS3542, Ka KS3587, MCA 546
10742	FIDDLE BIRD (Bob Wills)	Instrumental	Ka K886	Ka KL1542, Ka KS3542
10743	CAROLINA IN THE MORNING	Instrumental	Unissued	

MASTER NO.	TITLE & COMPOSER CREDIT	LEAD VOCAL	45 RPM	33 1/3 RPM
RCA Victor Studios Nashville, Tennessee September 29, 1967	Session Personnel: Same as for September 27, 1967, except add Romona Reed, vocal; Gordon Terry, fiddle; Henry "Tommy" Vaden, fiddle. Omit Wayne Butler, Quitman Dennis, Tommy Jackson, Grover "Shorty" Lavender, and Rufus Long.			
10744	RAIN DROPS IN THE RIVER (Eddie Novack)	G. Lambert		Ka KL1542, Ka KS3542
10745	WAY DOWN IN TEXAS (Jimmy Grider)	G. Lambert		Ka KL1542, Ka KS3542
10746	DON'T SEND HIM BACK TO ME (Rusty McDonald)	R. Reed		Ka KL1542, Ka KS3542
10747	BETCHA MY HEART (Lynn Phillips)	R. Reed		Ka KL1542, Ka KS3542
10748	BIG TATERS IN THE SANDY LAND (Bob Wills)	Instrumental		Ka KL1542, Ka KS3542
Columbia Studios Nashville, Tennessee April 16, 1968	Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Harold Bradley, electric guitar; David Briggs, piano; Vassar Clements, fiddle; Pete Drake, steel guitar; Murrey "Buddy" Harman, drums; Kelton Herston, guitar; Tommy Jackson, fiddle; Gene "Tag" Lambert, guitar; Rufus Long, saxophone & clarinet; Abe Mulkey (instrument not known); Gene Mullins, trombone; Bob Phillips, trumpet; Johnny Preston, vocal; Norbert Putnam, bass; Billy Sanford, banjo; George Tidwell, trumpet; Don Tweedy, saxophone; Henry "Tommy" Vaden, fiddle.			
11210	RUNNING BEAR (J. P. Richardson)	J. Preston		Ka KS3569, MCA 545
11211	IF I JUST HAD A HOME TO GO HOME TO (Harlan Howard)	J. Preston	Ka K2067	
11212	ACROSS THE ALLEY FROM THE ALAMO (Joe Greene)	G. Lambert	Ka K918, Ka KJB116, MCA 60085	Ka KS3569, Ka KS3641, MCA 545, MCA 153, MCA 2-4092
11213	TIME CHANGES EVERYTHING (Tommy Duncan)	J. Preston		Ka KS3569, Ka KS3587, MCA 545, MCA 546, MCA 2-4092
11214	TEXAS DOUBLE EAGLE (Willie Evans)	Instrumental		Ka KS3569, MCA 545, MCA 2-4092
Columbia Studios Nashville, Tennessee April 17, 1968	Session Personnel: Same as for April 16, 1968, except add Wayne Butler, trombone; John Courville (instrument?); Earl Dean Porter, guitar; Don Sheffield, trumpet. Kelton Herston becomes banjoist. Omit Gene Mullins, Johnny Preston, Billy Sanford, and George Tidwell.			
11215	SOUTHWESTERN WALTZ (Vaughn Horton)	Instrumental	Ka K2067	Ka KS3641, MCA 153, MCA 2-4092, MCA 1929 (for radio use only)
11216	CHEROKEE MAIDEN (Cindy Walker)	G. Lambert		Ka KS3569, MCA 545
11217	THERE'S NOT A HUNDRED MILES LEFT IN ME (Lawrence Reynolds)	G. Lambert		Ka KS3569, MCA 545
11218	I'M LIVING IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE (Katie Box)	G. Lambert	Ka K918	Ka KS3569, MCA 545
Columbia Studios Nashville, Tennessee April 18, 1968	Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Harold Bradley, electric guitar; David Briggs, piano; Wayne Butler, trombone; Pete Drake, steel guitar; Johnny Duke, saxophone; Murrey "Buddy" Harman, drums; Kelton Herston, guitar; Tommy Jackson, fiddle; Gene "Tag" Lambert, guitar; Bob Phillips, trumpet; Norbert Putnam, bass; Billy Sanford, banjo; Norman "Buddy" Spicher, fiddle; George Tidwell, trumpet; Don Tweedy, saxophone; Henry "Tommy" Vaden, fiddle.			
11219	SILVER BELLS (THAT RING IN THE NIGHT) (Wills - Stark)	Instrumental		Ka KS3569, Ka KS3641, MCA 545, MCA 153, MCA 2-4092
11220	LIMEHOUSE BLUES (Furber - Braham)	Instrumental		Ka KS3569, MCA 545
11221	MEMORY NO. 1 (Walker - Powell)	G. Lambert		Ka KS3569, MCA 545
11222	SOUTH OF THE BORDER (DOWN MEXICO WAY) (Kennedy - Carr)	G. Lambert	Ka KJB117, MCA 60086	Ka KS3569, Ka KS3587, Ka KS3641, MCA 545, MCA 546, MCA 153, MCA 2-4092
Bradley's Barn Nashville, Tennessee February 19, 1969	Session Personnel: Bob Wills, fiddle; Gene Crownover, steel guitar; Johnny Gimble, fiddle & electric mandolin; Tommy Jackson, fiddle; Gene "Tag" Lambert, lead guitar; Hargus "Pig" Robbins, piano. Other participants undetermined.			
11609	SONG OF THE WANDERER (WHERE SHALL I GO?) (Neil Moret)	Instrumental		Ka KS3601, MCA 152, MCA 2-4092
11610	SLOW POKE (Pee Wee King - Redd Stewart - Chilton Price)	G. Lambert		Ka KS3601, MCA 152

MASTER NO.	TITLE & COMPOSER CREDIT	LEAD VOCAL	45 RPM	33 1/3 RPM
11611	PAN HANDLE RAG (Leon McCauliffe)	Instrumental		Ka KS3601, Ka KS3641, MCA 152, MCA 153, MCA 2-4092
11612	NO LETTER TODAY (Frankie Brown)	G. Lambert		Ka KS3601, MCA 152
11613	SHAME ON YOU (Spade Cooley)	Instrumental		Ka KS3601, MCA 152

Bradley's Barn
Nashville, Tennessee
February 20, 1969

Personnel note: Vocal backup group takes part in today's session.

11614	WHOSE HEART ARE YOU BREAKING NOW (Floyd Jenkins)	G. Lambert		Ka KS3601, MCA 152, MCA 2-4092
11615	MY MARY (Stuart Hamblen - J. Davis)	B. Wills		Ka KS3601, MCA 152, MCA 2-4092
11616	IT'S A GOOD WORLD (Cindy Walker)	G. Lambert	Ka K988	
11617	WHAT KIND OF GIRL ARE YOU (Margaret Crownover - Bob Wills)	G. Lambert	Ka K2019	
11618	MILK COW BLUES (Kokomo Arnold)	Instrumental	Ka K988	Ka KS3601, Ka KS3641, MCA 152, MCA 153, MCA 2-4092

Bradley's Barn
Nashville, Tennessee
February 21, 1969

11619	TALKIN' 'BOUT YOU (Ray Charles)	B. Wills		Ka KS3601, MCA 152
11620	LOOK WHAT TROUBLE LEFT BEHIND (Margaret Crownover - Bob Wills)	G. Lambert	Ka K2019	
11621	BROWN SKIN GAL (Bob Wills)	Instrumental		Ka KS3601, MCA 152, MCA 2-4092

NOTE: A later album, Kapp KS3639, ostensibly by Mel Tillis and Bob Wills, is really just Mel Tillis performing mostly songs associated with Bob Wills. These tracks were recorded in March, 1970, ten months after Bob's paralyzing stroke in May, 1969. Consequently, this particular LP really does not qualify as part of the Bob Wills discography.

CAPITOL RECORDS

Merle Haggard's home
Bakersfield, California
September 27, 1971

Session Personnel: Bob Wills, leader; Alex Brashear, trumpet; William E. "Smokey" Dacus, drums; Glynn Duncan, vocal; Johnny Gimble, fiddle; Merle Haggard, fiddle; Joe Holley, fiddle; Leon McAuliffe, steel guitar; Tiny Moore, electric mandolin; Eldon Shamblin, electric guitar; Al Stricklin, piano; Johnnie Lee Wills, banjo; Luke Wills, bass.

SOUTH	Instrumental	Unissued
THE KIND OF LOVE I CAN'T FORGET	G. Duncan	Unissued
CORRINE, CORRINA	G. Duncan	Unissued
SITTIN' ON TOP OF THE WORLD	M. Haggard & L. McAuliffe	Unissued
Untitled	Instrumental	Unissued
MISERY	M. Haggard	Unissued
DON'T LET THE DEAL GO DOWN	Instrumental	Unissued
I NEVER KNEW	Instrumental	Unissued
SUGAR MOON	G. Duncan	Unissued
THE KIND OF LOVE I CAN'T FORGET	G. Duncan	Unissued
MY MOTHER'S EYES	J. Holley	Unissued
STEEL GUITAR RAG	Instrumental	Unissued
MY MARY	G. Duncan	Unissued
LA GOLONDRINA	Instrumental	Unissued
MISS MOLLY	L. McAuliffe	Unissued

NOTE: Master numbers were apparently never assigned. The songs are listed in sequence, however, This listing was prepared by Bonnie Haggard from listening to the session tapes in the Haggards' possession.

UNITED ARTISTS RECORDS

Sumet-Burnet Studio
Dallas, Texas
December 3, 1973

Session Personnel: Bob Wills, voice tracks; Tommy Allsup, bass; Keith Coleman, fiddle; William E. "Smokey" Dacus, drums; Johnny Gimble, fiddle & electric mandolin; Leon McAuliffe, steel guitar; Bob Moore, bass; Hoyle Nix, fiddle; Jody Nix, drums; Leon Rausch, bass; Eldon Shamblin, electric guitar; Al Stricklin, piano. Banjo is overdubbed by Johnny Gimble on a few songs.

MASTER NO.	TITLE & COMPOSER CREDIT	LEAD VOCAL	45 RPM	33 1/3 RPM
(13708)	BLUE BONNET LANE (C. Walker)	L. McAuliffe		UA LA216-J2, WGeUA 29668XD, JaLi LLS67061-2
(13701)	WHAT MAKES BOB HOLLER (C. Walker)	L. McAuliffe		UA LA216-J2, WGeUA 29668XD, JaLi LLS67061-2
(13709)	WHEN YOU LEAVE AMARILLO (C. Walker)	J. Nix		UA LA216-J2, WGeUA 29668XD, JaLi LLS67061-2
(13718)	COMIN' DOWN FROM DENVER (Arr. & Adapt. by H. Nix/B. Wills)	H. Nix		UA LA216-J2, WGeUA 29669XD, JaLi LLS67061-2
(13703)	GOIN' AWAY PARTY (C. Walker)	L. Rausch		UA LA216-J2, WGeUA 29668XD, JaLi LLS67061-2
(13712)	MY SHOES KEEP WALKING BACK TO YOU (B. Wills - L. Ross)	J. Nix		UA LA216-J2, WGeUA 29669XD, JaLi LLS67061-2
(13716)	SILVER LAKE BLUES (B. Wills)	Instrumental		UA LA216-J2, WGeUA 29669XD, JaLi LLS67061-2
	LA GOLONDRINA	Instrumental	Unissued	
	TWINKLE TWINKLE LITTLE STAR	Instrumental	Unissued	
(13704)	BIG BALL'S IN COWTOWN (H. Nix)	H. Nix		Ua LA216-J2, WGeUA 29668XD, JaLi LLS67061-2
	BOB WILLS SPECIAL	Instrumental	Unissued	
(13713)	MISS MOLLY (C. Walker)	L. McAuliffe		UA LA216-J2, WGeUA 29669XD, JaLi LLS67061-2
(13705)	KEEPER OF MY HEART (B. Wills - J. Irby)	L. Rausch		UA LA216-J2, WGeUA 29668XD, JaLi LLS67061-2
(13707)	BUBBLES IN MY BEER (C. Walker - T. Duncan - B. Wills)	L. Rausch		UA LA216-J2, WGeUA 29668XD, JaLi LLS67061-2
(13706)	TWIN GUITAR BOOGIE (L. McAuliffe - E. Shamblin)	Instrumental		UA LA216-J2, WG3UA 29668XD, JaLi LLS67061-2
(13714)	I CAN'T GO ON THIS WAY (F. Rose)	J. Nix		UA LA216-J2, WGeUA 29669XD, JaLi LLS67061-2

Sumet-Burnet Studio
Dallas, Texas
December 4, 1973

Personnel Note: Bob Wills suffered a stroke during the night and is absent today. Merle Haggard arrives and plays fiddle on certain sides. Charles R. Townsend is the announcer on "Playboy Theme."

(13711)	I WONDER IF YOU FEEL THE WAY I DO (B. Wills)	M. Haggard		UA LA216-J2, WGeUA 29669XD, JaLi LLS67061-2
(13699)	YEARNING (B. Davis - J. A. Burke)	M. Haggard		UA LA216-J2, WGeUA 29668XD, JaLi LLS67061-2
(13721)	CRIPPLED TURKEY (Arr. & Adapt. by H. Nix)	Instrumental		UA LA216-J2, WG3UA 29669XD, JaLi LLS67061-2
(13720)	SHE'S REALLY GONE (C. Haskins - H. Nix)	H. Nix		UA LA216-J2, WGeUA 29669XD, JaLi LLS67061-2
(13698)	PLAYBOY THEME (T. A. Dorsey - Bob Wills)	M. Haggard		UA LA216-J2, WGeUA 29668XD, JaLi LLS67061-2
(13719)	BABY, THAT WOULD SURE GO GOOD (C. Walker)	L. McAuliffe		UA LA216-J2, WGeUA 29669XD, JaLi LLS67061-2
(13702)	STAY ALL NIGHT (STAY A LITTLE LONGER)	L. Rausch		UA LA216-J2, WGeUA 29668XD, JaLi LLS67061-2
(13700)	FADED LOVE (J. Wills - B. Wills)	L. Rausch	UA XW556, AuFe K5719	UA LA216-J2, WGeUA 29668XD, JaLi LLS67061-2
(13710)	SAN ANTONIO ROSE (B. Wills)	L. Rausch	UA XW556, AuFe K5719	UA LA216-J2, WGeUA 29669XD, JaLi LLS67061-2
(13717)	MILK COW BLUES (K. Arnold)	L. Rausch		UA LA216-J2, WGeUA 29669XD, JaLi LLS67061-2
(13715)	THAT'S WHAT I LIKE 'BOUT THE SOUTH (A. Razaf)	L. McAuliffe		UA LA216-J2, WGeUA 29669XD, JaLi LLS67061-2

NOTE: The album set For the Last Time may also be released in Australia on Festival L70045/6, but there is no official confirmation at this writing.

33 1/3 RPM ALBUM TITLES

THE ANTONES

An LP6000 (10")	Old Time Favorites by Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys
An LP6010 (10")	Old Time Favorites by Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys

CAMAY

Camay 3001	Country & Western Bonanza
Camay 3023	Wagon Train Nuggets
Camay 3029	Westward Ho!
Camay 3040	Cowpoke

COLUMBIA

Co GP19 (2-LP set)	Country's Greatest Hits, Vol. 2
Co HL9003 (10")	Bob Wills Roundup
Co B3P10173-5 (3-LP set)	All Time Hits of Country Music
Co KG32416 (2-LP set)	The Bob Wills Anthology

COLUMBIA SPECIAL PRODUCTS (COUNTRY MUSIC MAGAZINE)

CoSP-CMM P212922 (2-LP set)	The Legendary Bob Wills

CORONET

Coronet CX-281 & CXS-281	Nashville's Fiddlin' Man Bob Wills//Bob Jones and the Ranch Hands

COUNTRY MUSIC ASSOCIATION

CMA 101	Here Lives Country Music - 1972 Hall of Fame Tribute Album
CMA CSM644	Country Music Salutes the Armed Forces

COUNTRY MUSIC RECORD CLUB (Division of Starday)

CMRC LP-GC1002	Golden Classics, Vol. 2
CMRC LP-GC1006	Golden Classics, Vol. 4
CMRC LP-GC1007	Golden Classics, Vol. 5

DECCA

De DL4134	The Original Hit Performances! - All-Time Country and Western, Vol. 3
De DL4775 & DL74775	The Original Hit Performances! - All-Time Country and Western, Vol. 7
De DL5562 (10")	Country and Western Dance-O-Rama No. 2
De DL8727 & DL78727	Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys
De DL8730	Western Swing in Hi-Fi

(English) CBS

EngCBS 52976	Blacks, Whites & Blues

EPIC

Ep BG-33782 (2-LP set)	Fathers & Sons

NOTE: Epic BG-33782 consists of one disc by Bob Wills and one disc by Asleep at the Wheel. The disc by Wills is a reissue of the Harmony LP titled Bob Wills Special (Harmony HL7036 & HS11358).

HARMONY

Ha HL7036 & HS11358	Bob Wills Special
Ha HL7292	The Great All-Time Country Hits, Vol. 1
Ha HL7304	The Best of Bob Wills & His Texas Playboys - Great Original Recordings
Ha HL7345	The Great Bob Wills

HILLBILLY HEAVEN

HH HHLP5006	In Memory of the Daddy of Western Swing

(Japanese) LIBERTY

JaLi 9341-2 (2-LP set)	Hall of Fame
JaLi LLS67061-2 (2-LP set)	Same as United Artists LA216-J2

(Japanese) MCA

JaMCA MCL-1074	Same as Decca DL8730
JaMCA 3013-17 (5-LP boxed set)	The Fifty Year History of Country Music

KAPP

Ka KL1506 & KS3506	From the Heart of Texas
Ka KL1523 & KS3523	Bob Wills - King of Western Swing
Ka KL1542 & KS3542	Here's That Man Again
Ka KS3569	Time Changes Everything
Ka KS3587	The Living Legend
Ka KS3601	Bob Wills Plays the Greatest String Band Hits
Ka KS3641	The Best of Bob Wills

33 1/3 RPM ALBUM TITLES

LIBERTY

Li LRP3173 & LST7173	Together Again
Li LRP3182 & LST7182	A Living Legend
Li LRP3194 & LST7194	Mr. Words & Mr. Music
Li LRP3303 & LST7303	Bob Wills Sings and Plays
Li LRP3305	Original Country Hits, Vol. 1
Li LRP3345	Original Country Hits, Vol. 2
Li LRP3382	Original Country Hits, Vol. 3
Li LST7569	Original Golden Country Greats, Vol. 1
Li LST7570	Original Golden Country Greats, Vol. 2
Li LST7571	Original Golden Country Greats, Vol. 3

NOTE: Li LST7569 through LST7571 are stereo equivalents of Li LRP3305, LRP3345, and LRP3382, respectively. Only the LP titles were slightly changed.

LIBRARY BI-CENTENNIAL

LBC 5	Dance Music: Ragtime, Jazz & More (From Folk Music in America series)

LONGHORN

Lo LP-001	Bob Wills Keepsake Album #1

MCA

MCA 152	Same as Kapp KS3601
MCA 153	Same as Kapp KS3641
MCA 526	Same as Decca DL8727 & DL78727
MCA 543	Same as Kapp KL1523 & KS3523
MCA 545	Same as Kapp KS3569
MCA 546	Same as Kapp KS3587
MCA 2-4092 (2-LP set)	The Best of Bob Wills, Vol. 2

MGM

MGM 1SE-33ST	The Last Picture Show
MGM E-91 (10")	Ranch House Favorites
MGM GAS-141	A Tribute to Bob Wills
MGM E-3352	Ranch House Favorites
MGM SE-4866	The History of Bob Wills & the Texas Playboys

METRO

Met M-594 & MS-594	Bob Wills

OLD TIMEY

OT 105	Western Swing
OT 116	Western Swing, Vol. 2
OT 117	Western Swing, Vol. 3

PREMIER

Premier PM-9046 & PS-9046	Same as Coronet CX-281 & CXS-281
Premier PM-9051 & PS-9051	Country & Western Bulls-Eyes

READER'S DIGEST

RD RDA-142-A (8-LP set)	Take Me Home Country Road

SPINORAMA

Spinorama M-180 & S-180	Same as Premier PM-9051 & PS-9051

STARDAY

St SLP256 (2-LP set)	The Country Music Hall of Fame, Vol. 3
St SLP263	Hap Peebles Presents Country Music U.S.A.
St SLP295 (2-LP set)	The Country Music Hall of Fame, Vol. 4
St SLP306	Let's Hit the Road
St SLP360 (2-LP set)	Country Music Hall of Fame, Vol. 5
St SLP375	Bob Wills, Tommy Duncan and Leon McAuliff
St SLP451 (2-LP set)	Country Music Memorial
St SLP469	The Bob Wills Story

NOTE: St SLP256 and St SLP295 are also repackaged, along with St SLP164, in a boxed set titled The Country Music Hall of Fame, Vol. A.

STEEL GUITAR CLUB OF AMERICA

SGCA 3	Jean Street Swing

33 1/3 RPM ALBUM TITLES

SUNSET

Su SUM1108 & SUS5108	Together!
Su SUS5248	A Country Walk - The Voice and Band of Bob Wills

UNITED ARTISTS

UA LA216-J2 (2-LP set)	For the Last Time
UA LA412-E	Very Best of Country Gold, Vol. 1
UA LA413-E	Very Best of Country Gold, Vol. 2
UA UAS9962 (2-LP set)	Hall of Fame

VOCALION

Vo VL3735 & VL73735	Western Swing Along
Vo VL3805 & VL73805	Western Star Parade, Vol. 1
Vo VL73922	San Antonio Rose

NOTE: Despite being in print for about two years, Vo VL73922 received practically no publicity. Consequently, few copies are in collectors' hands. The same disc may also be one advertised in Europe as Decca 739228. According to rumor, this is a U.S. pressing strictly for the European market.

(West German) MCA CORAL

WGeMCA COPS7361 (2-LP set)	Western Express
WGeMCA COPS7848 (2-LP set)	Super C & W Festival
WGeMCA 6.28347DS (2-LP set)	Super C & W Festival

(West German) UNITED ARTISTS

WGeUA 29669XD (2-LP set)	Same as United Artists LA216-J2

A Preliminary Bob Wills Filmusicography

FILM TITLE	PRINCIPAL STAR(S)	SONGS	LEAD VOCAL
Copyright date: November 11, 1940 Monogram Pictures	Participating Band Members: Bob Wills, Wayne Johnson, Son Lansford, Leon McAuliffe, Eldon Shamblin, Johnnie Lee Wills.		
TAKE ME BACK TO OKLAHOMA	Tex Ritter	GOOD OLD OKLAHOMA	L. McAuliffe
		CALAMITY JANE	Tex Ritter
		LONE STAR RAG	Instrumental
		PLAYBOY SPECIAL	Instrumental
		GONE INDIAN	Instrumental
		TAKE ME BACK TO TULSA	T. Ritter & B. Wills
		YOU ARE MY SUNSHINE	Tex Ritter
		GOOD OLD OKLAHOMA (fragment)	Tex Ritter
Copyright date: November 22, 1941 Columbia Pictures	Participating Band Members: Bob Wills, Tommy Duncan, Don Harlan, Wayne Johnson, Darrell Jones, Cap Kelly, Leon McAuliffe, Whoopy McCray, Jamie MacIntosh, Zeb McNally, Eldon Shamblin, Al Stricklin, Louis Tierney, Gene Tomlin.		
GO WEST YOUNG LADY	Glenn Ford, Ann Miller, Charles Ruggles, Penny Singleton	IDA RED	T. Duncan
		OSAGE STOMP (fragment in background)	Instrumental
Copyright date: October 15, 1942 Columbia Pictures	Participating Band Members: Bob Wills, Joe Holley, Harley Huggins, Millard Kelso, Leon McAuliffe, Luke Wills.		
THE LONE PRAIRIE	Russell Hayden	PLAIN OLD PLAINS	Group
		SALT RIVER VALLEY	Group
		RIDIN' FOR THE RANCHO	Group
		LIBERTY	Instrumental
		FIDDLIN' MAN	L. McAuliffe
Copyright date: December 15, 1942 Columbia Pictures	Participating Band Members: Bob Wills, Joe Holley, Harley Huggins, Millard Kelso, Leon McAuliffe, Luke Wills.		
A TORNADO IN THE SADDLE	Russell Hayden		

FILM TITLE	PRINCIPAL STAR(S)	SONGS	LEAD VOCAL
Copyright date: February 15, 1943 Columbia Pictures	Participating Band Members: Leon McAuliffe, Luke Wills.	Bob Wills, Joe Holley, Harley Huggins, Millard Kelso,	
RIDERS OF THE NORTHWEST MOUNTED	Russell Hayden	WHEN YOU'RE A MOUNTIE	Group; + solos by B. & L. Wills, H. Huggins, & L. McAuliffe
		SONG OF THE RIPPLING STREAM	H. Huggins
		BLUEBONNET LANE	H. Huggins
		THE LAST GOODBYE	Bob Wills
Copyright date: March 23, 1943 Columbia Pictures	Participating Band Members: Cotton Thompson, Luke Wills.	Bob Wills, Jesse Ashlock, Lester Barnard, Jr., Leon McAuliffe,	
SADDLES AND SAGEBRUSH	Russell Hayden	TOODLEUMBO	Group
		HUBBIN' IT	L. McAuliffe, J. Ashlock, & B. Wills alternate
		KI YI YIPPEE YEA	B. Wills
		GET ALONG (?)	Group
		HUBBIN' IT	Group
Copyright date: September 10, 1943 Columbia Pictures	Participating Band Members: Leon McAuliffe, Luke Wills.	Bob Wills, Joe Holley, Harley Huggins, Millard Kelso,	
SILVER CITY RAIDERS	Russell Hayden	MISS MOLLY	L. McAuliffe
		COWBOY'S SERENADE	Group; + B. Wills (solo)
		HAPPY GO LUCKY	Group
		LONESOME GAL	B. Wills
Copyright date: December 23, 1943 Columbia Pictures	Participating Band Members: Cotton Thompson, Luke Wills.	Bob Wills, Jesse Ashlock, Lester Barnard, Jr., Leon McAuliffe,	
THE VIGILANTE'S RIDE	Russell Hayden	WESTWARD BOUND (?)	L. McAuliffe
		LAST OUTPOST IN THE SKY	Group
		MY TUCSON GAL	B. Wills
		ARIZONA MOON	B. Wills

FILM TITLE	PRINCIPAL STAR(S)	SONGS	LEAD VOCAL
Copyright date: April 20, 1944 Columbia Pictures	Participating Band Members: Bob Wills, Jesse Ashlock, Lester Barnard, Jr., Leon McAuliffe, Cotton Thompson, Luke Wills.		
WYOMING HURRICANE	Russell Hayden	IT'S A GRAND OLD WORLD	Bob Wills
		I HEAR YOU TALKING	C. Thompson
		TODAY IS ELECTION DAY	L. McAuliffe
		NIGHT ON THE RANGE	Group; + B. Wills (solo)
		IT'S A GRAND OLD WORLD	Group
Copyright date: June 22, 1944 Columbia Pictures	Participating Band Members: Bob Wills, Jesse Ashlock, Lester Barnard, Jr., Leon McAuliffe, Cotton Thompson, Luke Wills.		
THE LAST HORSEMAN	Russell Hayden	O.K. OKLAHOMA	B. Wills
		RIDIN' ON DOWN	C. Thompson
		TROUBLE ON THE RANGE	Group; + L. McAuliffe (solo)
		STONEY POINT	Instrumental
		POWDER RIVER	L. McAuliffe
		DREAMY EYES WALTZ	Instrumental
		ON THE IDAHO PLAINS	L. McAuliffe
		O.K. OKLAHOMA	L. McAuliffe
Copyright date: October 7, 1944 Warner Bros.	Participating Band Members: Bob Wills, Les Anderson, Jesse Ashlock, Tommy Duncan, Cameron Hill, Tiny Mott, Laura Lee Owens, Rip Ramsey, Carlisle Schnitzer, Louis Tierney, Jimmy Wyble.		
BOB WILLS AND HIS TEXAS PLAYBOYS (10-minute short)	Bob Wills	RIDE ON (MY PRAIRIE PINTO)	T. Duncan
		MY ADOBE HACIENDA	L. Owens
		MAMA DON'T ALLOW	B. Wills; + unknown female vocalist
		NEW SAN ANTONIO ROSE	T. Duncan
		SMITH'S REEL	Instrumental
Copyright date: June 7, 1945 Columbia Pictures	Participating Band Members: Bob Wills, Ted Adams, Noel Boggs, Alex Brashear, Tommy Duncan, Cameron Hill, Joe Holley, Millard Kelso, Monte Mountjoy, Jimmy Wyble.		
RHYTHM ROUNDUP	Ken Curtis		

FILM TITLE	PRINCIPAL STAR(S)	SONGS	LEAD VOCAL
Copyright date: October 15, 1945 Columbia Pictures	Participating Band Members: Bob Wills, Noel Boggs, Tommy Duncan, Cameron Hill, Joe Holley, Millard Kelso, Monte Mountjoy, Jimmy Wyble. Possibly also Ted Adams and Alex Brashear.		
BLAZING THE WESTERN TRAIL	Charles Starrett		
Copyright date: November 15, 1945 Columbia Pictures	Participating Band Members: Bob Wills, Noel Boggs, Tommy Duncan, Joe Holley, Millard Kelso, Jimmy Wyble. Others?		
LAWLESS EMPIRE	Charles Starrett		
Copyright date: August 14, 1946 Universal Pictures	Participating Band Members: Bob Wills, Lester Barnard, Jr., Noel Boggs, Tommy Duncan, Millard Kelso, Dean & Evelyn McKinney, Louis Tierney, Luke Wills. Trumpet player may be Alex Brashear; drummer may be Johnny Cuviello.		
FRONTIER FROLIC (Musical short)	Bob Wills	TEXAS PLAYBOY RAG I BETCHA' MY HEART I LOVE YOU WESTERN MEDLEY SAN ANTONIO ROSE GOODBYE LIZA JANE	Instrumental

NOTE: Wills's appearances in nontheatrical films, such as various TV show performances, are not included. For details on the Snader Telescription films, please refer to the portion of the discography immediately following MGM Records.

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